NATION

35 Naxals surrender in Ch'garh hours before deadline

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

150% STT hike on F&O effective from today

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

Pressure on Pant as LSG begin IPL against DC

≫ Page: 8 ≪

www.twitter.com/EnglishSalar
www.facebook.com/EnglishSalar
www.instagram.com/dailysalarenglish
youtube.com/@dailysalardigital

SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 1 APRIL 2026 | WEDNESDAY | BENGALURU | 12 SHAWWAL 1447 H | Vol 5 | Issue No 80 | Pages: 8

Go get your own oil: Trump fumes at allies

Says US will not help UK and France anymore

DUBAI, 31 MARCH

Donald Trump on Tuesday sharply criticised key allies, warning the United Kingdom and France that the United States "won't be there to help you anymore" as divisions widened over the ongoing conflict with Iran.

In a series of posts, Trump expressed frustration at allies' refusal to join US-led military action, urging them to "learn how to fight for yourself" and even "go get your own oil". His remarks come as Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz — a vital global energy route — has pushed average US fuel prices above USD 4 per gallon and disrupted supplies worldwide.

Trump singled out France as "very unhelpful" for denying overflight access for military supplies bound for Israel, warning that "the USA will remember". He also called on allies to rely on American oil exports and take greater responsibility for securing maritime routes.

"Number 1, buy from the US, we have plenty, and Number 2, build up some delayed courage, go to the Strait, and just TAKE IT."

"Well, I think it'll automatically open, but my attitude is, I've obliterated the country. They have no strength left, and let the countries that are using the strait, let them go and open it… because I would imagine whoever's controlling the oil will be very happy to open the Strait," he told the New York Post. "We're not going to be there too much longer." US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth reinforced the administration's stance, saying other nations must step up to protect the critical waterway rather than depend solely on the US Navy.

Howevear, several European countries have resisted deeper involvement. Spain has closed its airspace to US military aircraft linked to the conflict, while Italy reportedly denied use of the Sigonella air base. France has allowed limited use of its Istres base. —PTI

Donald Trump expressed frustration at the allies' refusal to join the US-led military action. —PTI

IRAN NUKE SITE BOMBED

Trump's comments followed major US airstrikes on Isfahan, a central Iranian city housing a key nuclear enrichment facility. Reports said bunker-buster bombs were used, triggering a massive fireball and mushroom-shaped cloud over the site.

WEST ASIA WAR DAY-33

IRAN PASSES PLAN TO CHARGE TOLL AT STRAIT OF HORMUZ

Iran's Parliament Security Committee has approved a Strait of Hormuz management plan aimed at asserting greater control over the key global shipping route amid escalating tensions in West Asia.

According to state media IRIB, the plan includes imposing tolls on vessels passing through the waterway, strengthening security arrangements, ensuring ship safety and environmental protection, and introducing a rial-based toll system. It also bans vessels from the United States and Israel, as well as countries participating in unilateral sanctions against Iran, and outlines cooperation with Oman on a legal framework.

The move follows reports of a partial closure of the Strait by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps after joint US-Israeli military action. The Strait of Hormuz handles nearly 20 per cent of global oil and LNG shipments. —Agencies

>>>More on Pgs 5, 6 & 7

Mahan Air is one of Iran's largest private carriers –x

'WAR CRIME': IRAN SAYS US STRIKE HIT INDIA-BOUND PLANE

TEHRAN, 31 MARCH

An An India-bound aircraft operated by Mahan Air was reportedly struck during a United States airstrike at Mashhad International Airport, Iranian sources said, raising concerns over the safety of civilian and humanitarian aviation.

Iran's Civil Aviation Organisation condemned the incident as a "war crime" and violation of international law, stating the aircraft was carrying medical equipment and medicines as part of a humanitarian mission to New Delhi.

The strike disrupted the planned aid operation between Iran and India, where humanitarian coordination has intensified in recent weeks. Earlier this month, India had dispatched aid consignments to Iran, highlighting longstanding ties. Mahan Air, one of Iran's largest private carriers, has long been under US sanctions over alleged links to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

INDIA'S 1ST IRANIAN OIL CARGO SINCE 2019 HEADED TO GUJARAT

India's first Iranian crude cargo since 2019 is likely headed to Gujarat, signalling a tentative revival in oil trade after a US sanctions waiver. Ship-tracking data shows the tanker Ping Shun carrying about 600,000 barrels from Kharg Island is en route to Vadinar, with arrival expected on 4 April. .

Imports had ceased in May 2019 after sanctions tightened. —PTI

No govt air quality monitoring in 40% of India

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

Around 40 per cent of India's districts have no government-operated air quality monitoring station, leaving millions without reliable information on the air they breathe, a study released on Tuesday said. The analysis, 'Air Quality Data Accessibility in India: Distribution, Gaps, and Network Correlations', was released by Airvoice, a global company which develops solutions for monitoring and managing air quality. The authors of the report analysed India's three main monitoring systems: the manual National Air Monitoring Programme (NAMP), the Continuous Ambient Air Quality Monitoring (CAAQM) network, and the System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting And Research (SAFAR), using official datasets up to 2025. – PTI

AI flight makes emergency landing after smoke alert

LUCKNOW, 31 MARCH

A Delhi-bound Air India Express flight from Bagdogra (Siliguri) made an emergency landing at the Chaudhary Charan Singh International Airport here after a smoke alarm, sources said on Tuesday. The flight (IX1523), operated by an Airbus A320 aircraft, was diverted to Lucknow on Monday evening after the pilot issued a "Mayday" call — an internationally recognised distress signal used in life-threatening emergencies — after the crew detected smoke in the avionics bay. Air Traffic Control (ATC) Lucknow was alerted about the diversion, and the aircraft landed safely at around 5.18 pm. 148 people, including six crew members, were aboard the flight. – PTI

IAF TO GET 2 MOUNTAIN RADARS WORTH RS 1,950 CR

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

The defence ministry on Tuesday inked a Rs 1,950 crore contract with state-run Bharat Electronics Limited for the procurement of two mountain radars and related infrastructure for the Indian Air Force.

The installation and commissioning of these radars will boost the country's air defence and strengthen national security, the ministry said, adding the procurement will also reduce the dependency on foreign equipment.

This mountain radar is indigenously designed and developed by Electronics and Radar Development Establishment of DRDO (Defence Research and Development Organisation) and will be manufactured by BEL.

Designed by Electronics and Radar Development Establishment under the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and to be manufactured by BEL under the Buy (Indian-IDDM) category. The deal covers fixed, medium-power systems with associated equipment and forward deployment infrastructure.

It is learnt, the radars will be deployed at Gulmarg in Jammu and Kashmir and Pfütsero in Nagaland, targeting vulnerable stretches along India's northern and northeastern borders.

"The installation and commissioning of these radars will boost the country's air defence and strengthen national security," a government statement said. Sources said the radars address a long-standing gap in India's mountainous terrain. —PTI

Eight devotees killed in stampede at Bihar temple

BIHAR SHARIF, 31 MARCH

At least eight devotees, mostly women, were killed and five were injured in a stampede at a temple in Bihar's Nalanda district on Tuesday, officials said.

The incident took place due to the heavy rush of devotees at the Sheetla Mata temple on Tuesday morning, an officer said.

Bihar Sharif ASP Noorul Haque said, "At least eight devotees, mostly women, died in the stampede at the Shitala Mata temple on Tuesday. Several devotees were also injured in the incident. Police and the district administration have reached the spot, and rescue work is on."

Chief Minister Nitish Kumar expressed grief over the deaths of devotees in the stampede and announced an ex-gratia for the kin of the deceased.

Haque said officials are trying to ascertain the identity of the deceased.

Shubham Kumar, the Deputy Development Commissioner (DDC) of Nalanda, told the media that the incident might have occurred due to heavy rush in the temple.

The SHO of the Deep Nagar police station was suspended for dereliction of duty. "An inquiry has been ordered to find out the cause of the incident. Officials are scrutinising CCTV footage. Forensic experts have also been engaged," said a statement issued by the district police.

Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary in a post on X said, "The incident at Sheetla Mata Temple is heart breaking. The government is providing every possible assistance to the affected families."

Leader of Opposition in the Bihar Assembly, Tejashwi Yadav, accused the government of alleged "administrative mismanagement" for the incident. —PTI

Wreckage at the Sheetla Mata temple after a stampede that killed at least eight devotees in Bihar Sharif, Nalanda district –PTI

- The SHO of the Deep Nagar police station was suspended for dereliction of duty. Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced an ex gratia of Rs 2 lakh for the families of the deceased and Rs 50,000 for those injured.

Relatives mourn at a hospital following a stampede at the Sheetla Mata temple in Nalanda district, Bihar, on Tuesday –PTI

Tennis legend Leander Paes joins BJP

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

Tennis legend Leander Paes joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Tuesday, calling it "not just a formality but a responsibility" and a major opportunity to serve the nation.

The 52-year-old was inducted in the presence of Union ministers Kiren Rijiju and Sukanta Majumdar, along with senior leaders Arun Singh and Anil Baluni. Rijiju described the move as a "moment of pride" and hoped Paes would play a "bigger innings" in politics.

Paes said his decision was driven by a commitment to empower youth through sports, education and skill development, highlighting India's large young population. He credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the country's progress in infrastructure and economic growth, saying it positions India as a rising global power.

He added that he looked forward to learning from BJP leadership and contributing to nation-building across regions. Paes had earlier joined the All India Trinamool Congress in 2021 and campaigned in the Goa elections in 2022, though he did not contest. —PTI

>>>More on Page 3 & 5

Girl fleeing sexual abuse by stepdad gangraped in Odisha

BERHAMPUR BHUBANESWAR, 31 MARCH

A 17-year-old girl who fled alleged sexual abuse by her stepfather in Andhra Pradesh was reportedly drugged and gangraped by two men in Odisha's Berhampur, police said on Tuesday.

Odisha Police have arrested two persons and detained a minor in connection with the incident. Berhampur Superintendent of Police Saravana Vivek M said the accused include two adults, aged 23 and 19, while a 15-year-old boy has been sent to a juvenile home.

Police said the girl, a native of Kadapa district, had boarded the Prashanti Express and reached Berhampur railway station on March 24 to escape abuse at home. She later found work at a tea stall near the station, where she befriended a local boy.

On March 29, the boy allegedly took her to meet his friends. During the meeting, she was reportedly given a drink laced with sedatives, causing her to lose consciousness. The two adults then allegedly raped her, while the minor assisted them.

She was later found by locals, who alerted police. The survivor has undergone medical examination and was produced before the District Child Welfare Committee, which placed her in a child care home.

The incident came to the fore a day after Bhubaneswar Police arrested two ambulance drivers on the charge of raping a 21-year-old woman from neighbouring West Bengal. —PTI

DGCA gets new head after IndiGo row

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

Three months after large-scale flight cancellations at IndiGo disrupted air travel across the country, the top official at India's aviation safety regulator has been moved out.

Senior IAS officer Vir Vikram Yadav has been appointed Director General of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), succeeding Faiz Ahmed Kidwai, who moves to the Department of Personnel and Training as Additional Secretary.

A 1996-batch Odisha cadre officer and currently Additional Secretary in the Environment Ministry, Yadav takes charge at a time when the DGCA faces multiple challenges, including ensuring safety standards, managing disruptions, and navigating pressures from the West Asia conflict. Under Kidwai, the regulator dealt with airline lapses, crashes involving non-scheduled operators, and the fatal Air India plane crash in June 2025.

INDIGO'S NEW CEO

Separately, IndiGo on Tuesday named William Walsh, a pilot and current head of the International Air Transport Association, as its next CEO, less than three weeks after the sudden exit of Pieter Elbers following the disruptions in December. —PTI

>>>More on Page 7

ABOVE NORMAL RAINS TOO

IMD warns of more heatwave days than usual across India until June

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

Above-normal heatwave days are likely across parts of east, central and northwest India, as well as the southeast peninsula, between April and June, even as above-normal rainfall is expected in April, the India Meteorological Department said on Tuesday.

Maximum temperatures during April–June are expected to remain normal to below normal over much of the country. However, most parts of east and northeast India, eastern central regions and adjoining peninsular areas are likely to see above-normal daytime temperatures. Minimum temperatures are forecast to be above normal across most regions, except parts of Maharashtra and Telangana where they may remain normal to below normal.

–FREEPIK

Minimum temperatures are expected to be above normal in most parts, barring isolated pockets in the south peninsula.

Rainfall in April is predicted to be normal to above normal over most of the country, except Northeast India where below-normal rainfall is expected.

The IMD said neutral El Niño–Southern Oscillation conditions currently prevail, with some weak La Niña-like features. Forecasts suggest ENSO-neutral conditions will continue till June, with chances of El Niño developing thereafter.

Reviewing March, the IMD noted rainfall was the 10th highest since 2001, aided by eight western disturbances. No heatwave conditions were recorded in the latter half of the month.

The department noted that a total of 32 people died in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Haryana, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Assam, Chhattisgarh, and Kerala, due to lightning events in March. —PTI

— ANI

Customs officials seize ganja from passengers at KIA

BENGALURU, 31 MARCH

Customs officials at Kempegowda International Airport in the City intercepted large quantities of hydroponic ganja from passengers arriving from Bangkok on 29 and 30 March, arresting six individuals. The seizures were made when contraband was found concealed in checked-in baggage. According to officials, 17.45kg of hydroponic ganja valued at Rs 6.10 crore was seized from five passengers on 29 March. On the previous day, another passenger was intercepted with 11.5kg of the banned substance, valued at Rs 4.02 crore. All six suspects have been arrested under the NDPS Act. Probe is ongoing to trace the source, distribution network of the seized narcotics. Efforts are on to curb drug trafficking via the airport. —*PTI*

Woman severely burnt in petrol can blast in Dharwad

DHARWAD, 31 MARCH

A 32-year-old woman, Poornima Kallappa Hadimani, sustained severe burns after a petrol can stored inside her house caught fire and exploded in Tadakod village, Dharwad taluk. She suffered nearly 80 per cent burns and is in critical condition. Initially treated at the district hospital, she was later transferred to KIMS Hospital in Hubballi for advanced care. The incident occurred in Harijanakeri locality, where petrol had been stored in a can following rumours of a fuel shortage. The can was kept near a refrigerator. While Poornima was in the kitchen, the petrol can suddenly ignited and exploded, causing a blaze that engulfed the house. Authorities warn public against storing highly flammable substances inside homes. —*SALAR NEWS*

K'taka expert team to track Arunachal rogue elephant

ITANAGAR, 31 MARCH

A 12-member expert team from the State has been deployed in Deomali, Arunachal Pradesh's Tirap district, to track and relocate an elephant responsible for multiple human casualties over the past two years, officials said. The team, arrived on Monday, is led by senior veterinary officer and elephant specialist Ramesha H, including experts in tranquilisation, wildlife monitoring, and trained mahouts from Karnataka's elephant camps. The operation will utilise 'kumki' (trained) elephants and thermal drones to track the animal and facilitate its safe capture and relocation. Deomali Range Forest Officer Diwang Lowang urged residents to stay alert. —*PTI*

Elephant Gajendra relocated amid public concern

BENGALURU, 31 MARCH

A 63-year-old elephant named Gajendra, living alone at Boodipadaga elephant camp in Chamarajanagar district, has been relocated to Mathigodu camp in the Nagarahole range following orders from Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre. Gajendra, a symbol of pride for the state and a participant in the Dasara festival, became weak after becoming isolated. Due to loneliness, he lost his ability to defend himself against wild elephants when released into the forest. A social media campaign and public appeals prompted the minister to act. On 26 March, Eshwar Khandre issued a written order, and today he was shifted after performing rituals at Boodipadaga. Public gratitude and appreciation flowed on social media for the minister's response. —*SALAR NEWS*

BJP hiking prices from 1 April: Surjewala

DKS says people forced to use firewood; govt to supply asphalt to contractors amid hikes

BENGALURU, 31 MARCH

Congress General Secretary and Karnataka in-charge Randeep Singh Surjewala on Tuesday attacked the Centre over price rise, alleging that 1 April has become "a day of loot, rob and fleece" under the BJP-led union government, impacting the lives and livelihoods of people.

The new financial rules are set to begin at the start of April.

Addressing a press conference with Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, Surjewala accused the BJP of using inflation as a tool to "swindle, plunder and burglarise" public money.

"1 April has become a day of loot, rob and fleece for the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government and the BJP," the Rajya Sabha member said.

Surjewala alleged that rising toll collections reflected "highway robbery", claiming that the Centre had collected massive revenues from Karnataka alone over the years.

"Since 2019-20, the Modi government and the BJP have collected Rs 23,000 crore by 'pickpocketing' the people of Karnataka alone," he said, adding that toll charges would be increased by about five per cent from 1 April.

Citing the Bengaluru-Mysuru highway as an example, he claimed that toll was collected even before the project was completed. "They have already collected Rs 900 crore from the Bengaluru-Mysuru Highway alone."

Surjewala further accused the Centre of burdening patients by increasing the cost of medicines.

"From 1 April, 2026, the Modi government is hiking the prices of 900 essential drugs and medicines," he said, adding that even life-saving drugs and treatments for diseases such as diabetes and hypertension would become costlier.

DyCM DK Shivakumar and AICC General Secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala at a presser at the KPCC office on Tuesday —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

Surjewala also pointed to rising input costs in sectors such as construction, petrochemicals and consumer goods, alleging that higher prices of materials like steel, cement, PVC and bitumen would directly impact housing and infrastructure development. "What will the common man do?".

> **The Centre has 'April Fooled' the people by increasing the prices of various items from 1st April. What happened to the 'Acche Din' Modi promised? Should we now call what we have 'Kaccha Din'** -DK Shivakumar, Deputy Chief Minister

Shivakumar noted that that cement prices have risen by Rs 50 to Rs 100 per bag, while iron prices have increased from Rs 47,000 to Rs 59,000 per tonne.

Surjewala further criticised the hike in postal charges, saying, "Speed post rates have gone up by 34 per cent."

Highlighting the rise in fuel and transport-related expenses, he said LPG prices had sharply increased over the years and alleged that airfares and other travel costs were also rising.

Shivakumar said people were being forced to switch to firewood due to an acute shortage of LPG caused by the Centre's foreign policy.

"The Centre's Ujjwala scheme has become a 'Saude Bhagya' (firewood scheme)" Shivakumar alleged.

He added that hotels were shutting down and people were being forced to use electric stoves. "Over the past 15 days, electricity consumption in the State has risen by 10 per cent," he claimed.

"Tenders have already been called by the Public Works Department for laying bitumen (asphalt), and work has already begun. I have informed contractors and officials in Bengaluru that rather than halting work due to price increases, the government will directly supply bitumen," Shivakumar said. —*PTI*

Cong has strong support in Bagalkot: CM

BAGALKOT/BENGALURU, 31 MARCH

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday said that public support for Congress candidate Umesh Meti in the Bagalkot assembly by-election is "beyond expectations".

Bypolls for the Bagalkot and Davangere South Assembly constituencies will be held on 9 April. They were necessitated due to the deaths of senior Congress MLAs HY Meti and Shamanur Shivashankarappa, respectively.

Speaking to the reporters while campaigning in Bagalkot, Siddaramaiah expressed confidence in Umesh Meti's victory.

The Chief Minister also highlighted the contributions of HY Meti, saying he worked hard for the development of Bagalkot and served for the prosperity of all classes. Siddaramaiah dismissed BJP's charge of nepotism, saying it was the tradition Congress always gave tickets to children of deceased MLAs.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, former chief minister BS Yediyurappa —*x*

TEACH CONG A LESSON: BSY

Veteran BJP leader BS Yediyurappa urged voters of Bagalkot and Davangere South Assembly constituencies to teach "Congress a lesson", saying that if the ruling party, which already has a "brute majority" in the State won the upcoming bypolls, they will "indulge in more corruption".

Speaking to press in the City, he said the current administration resembles a "Tughlaq Darbar".

He said he will campaign on Tuesday and Wednesday for Srinivas in Davangere and then will go campaign for Bagalkot candidate Charantimath on 5 and 6 April.

DOOR OPEN FOR YATNAL?

Responding to a question on expelled BJP legislator Basangouda Patil Yatnal willing to campaign on behalf of party candidate in Bagalkot, the former CM said, "Let anyone come, there is an opportunity. I welcome it."

'LEARNING HINDI DOESN'T HURT KANNADA'

Asked about the State government's decision to replace the marks system for third languages like Hindi in the SSLC (Class 10) exam with a grading system, Yediyurappa said that learning Hindi will not affect Kannada.

"It is difficult to converse in any language other than Hindi across the country," he said. "It (learning Hindi) is not a betrayal of Kannada." —*PTI*

Two sisters fell out of a moving KSRTC bus in Belthangadi taluk on Tuesday. They survived, and one of them then wrote her SSLC exam —*SCREENGRAB*

KSRTC bus door flings open, 2 students fall out

MANGALURU, 31 MARCH

Two students fell out of a KSRTC bus near Mangaluru when the door suddenly flung open while moving. The incident occurred on Reshme road near Gerukatte in Belthangadi taluk on Tuesday.

SSLC student Charishma and her sister PUC student Chasmica who were travelling on the footsteps of the bus were thrown out from the bus and onto the road.

Charishna, after getting first aid from the government hospital, attended her annual examination.

The conductor of the bus said the door opened on its own, and suspected a mechanical fault to be the cause of the incident. —*Salar News*

MAHAVEER JAYANTHI

As part of the Mahaveer Jayanthi celebrations, people from the Jain community took out a rally in Bengaluru on Tuesday. The festival marks the birth of Lord Mahavir, the 24th and final Tirthankara, or a divine figure in Jainism

PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

Traffic cops canned for bribes, closing bodycams

BENGALURU, 31 MARCH

Three traffic police personnel from High Grounds Traffic Police Station have been suspended for allegedly extorting money illegally from motorists under the pretext of violations, while deliberately switching off their body-worn cameras, officials confirmed. They reportedly collected money from motorists despite no visible traffic violations, by extending their duty hours. Following multiple public complaints, an inquiry led to the suspension of an Assistant Sub-Inspector and two constables by Deputy Commissioner of Police (Traffic West). Officials said there were numerous complaints about harassment, unauthorised vehicle checks, and unlawful collection of fines. The officers failed to follow rules mandating active body-worn cameras during enforcement. The extent of the misconduct is being probed. —*PTI*

37 quintals of chilli crop burnt by 'miscreants'

RAICHUR, 31 MARCH

In a disturbing act, miscreants set fire to over 37 quintals of chilli crop at Survey No. 20, Yadivala village, Manvi taluk, Raichur district, by pouring petrol on Sunday evening. The crop, valued at around Rs 7 lakh, was destroyed after flames ignited at about 8pm when no one was present.

Farmer Maulappa Nayak, tearfully, said he had cultivated the land on 2.5 acres, spending Rs 3 lakh on water and land preparation, and was about to go to the market when the incident occurred.

Despite efforts by police and fire services, the flames could not be extinguished.

Villagers called for strict legal action against the culprits, noting a previous similar incident in Jagir Pannur where miscreants set fire to jowar. —*Salar News*

Woman found hanging; murder probe on

RAICHUR, 31 MARCH

- Vidya was found hanging just after breastfeeding her 11-month-old baby

A woman was found dead under suspicious circumstances in the city's IB Colony. Many doubts have arisen about the death of Vidya, 30, the mother of an 11-month-old baby. Her family alleged that her husband and mother-in-law hanged her to death.

Vidya, was working at the Sub-Science Center in Raichur city. She had married Manjunath about two years ago. At the time of marriage, Vidya's parents had given 30 grams of gold and half a kilogram of silver. Despite this, her husband Manjunath and mother-in-law Kavitha had been allegedly harassing her.

On Monday evening, Manjunath, who was heavily intoxicated, went to Vidya's workplace and brought her home. After returning home, Vidya breastfed her 11-month-old baby and reportedly told her mother-in-law about her husband's drinking. However, by the time the baby finished feeding, Vidya was found hanging.

Vidya's family said that she was killed by her husband and mother-in-law, who staged it as a suicide. Based on the complaint filed by Vidya's family, a case has been registered against her husband Manjunath and mother-in-law Kavitha for dowry harassment. —*Salar News*

MINORS AMONG ACCUSED

Suspects held for mass IPL phone theft

BENGALURU, 31 MARCH

The police said on Tuesday that they have arrested the prime accused and some juveniles, in connection with a series of mobile phone thefts during the IPL match in Bengaluru on 28 March.

Police said they had seized 21 mobile phones of different brands, valued at Rs 18 lakh.

Reigning champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) won against Sunrisers Hyderabad in the opening fixture of IPL 2026, held at the Chinnaswamy Stadium here on 28 March.

21 mobile phones were seized from the main accused, it said, adding that "several of his associates and minors are being probed. The investigation is going on."

Bengaluru Police Commissioner Seemanth Kumar Singh told reporters that after the IPL match, complaints were received about mobile phone thefts in and around the stadium area, and cases were registered.

City Police Commissioner Seemanth Kumar Singh takes a look at the phones recovered by Cubbon Park Police, on Tuesday —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

"Police's crime squad nabbed a gang based on CCTV and technical evidence, and recovered 21 phones from them," he said.

More information is being gathered from those taken into custody and efforts are on to nab the others involved, he said."Those involved had come from other states and had stayed at a hotel. It is being investigated whether they had come for this (mobiles theft) alone or whether they were involved in similar incidents in other places," he said adding a total of 29 cases had been filed. — PTI

Techie kills self moments after husband's suicide

BENGALURU, 31 MARCH

A young techie couple from Telangana has died by suicide in a tragic sequence of events at their apartment in the City. Bhanu Chander Reddy Kunta, 32, a software engineer from Siddipet, Telangana, hanged himself on Monday night, and upon discovering his body, his wife jumped to her death.

His wife, Bibi Shaziya Siraj, 31, an employee at IBM, found their room's door locked. When her repeated knocks went unanswered, she alerted security and neighbours. When residents forcibly opened the door, they discovered Bhanu dead.

Moments later, Shaziya jumped from the 17th floor of the same building.

Investigations are ongoing to determine the circumstances, including possible health issues, relationship problems, and emotional distress.

Post-mortem reports are awaited.

The deaths have been reported as separate unnatural incidents, with family members in Telangana filing complaints.

Both Bhanu and Shaziya, married for approximately nine years and previously in a live-in relationship, worked as software engineers for private companies.

Police confirmed that Bhanu died by hanging, and upon seeing him, Shaziya reportedly jumped from the 17th floor. Kothanur police have registered a case, and further investigations are underway into these tragic events. —*PTI*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.

—ANI

Sonia Gandhi discharged from hospital

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

Senior Congress leader Sonia Gandhi was discharged from Sir Ganga Ram Hospital after recovering from a systemic infection, doctors confirmed. She was admitted on 24 March at around 10.20pm with a fever and spent seven days in hospital. Hospital chairman Dr Ajay Swaroop stated she responded well to antibiotics. A systemic infection occurs when pathogens such as bacteria enter the bloodstream and spread throughout the body. Doctors said she has now recovered and will continue further treatment and follow-up at home. —*PTI*

Molestation case: Punjab HC acquits AAP MLA, others

CHANDIGARH, 31 MARCH

The Punjab and Haryana High Court acquitted AAP MLA Manjinder Singh Lalpura and seven others in a 2013 molestation and assault case, following a compromise. Justice Tribhuvan Dahiya set aside a previous conviction and quashed the FIR registered under the IPC and SC/ST Act. The complainant, belonging to the Scheduled Caste community, alleged she was assaulted by the accused during a visit to Tarn Taran. The court noted the petitioners had no criminal antecedents, the offences were not heinous, and the dispute was amicably resolved. The court cited the Supreme Court rulings that cases of a civil nature resolved by compromise can be quashed to promote peaceful coexistence. —*PTI*

LS to table bill to make Amaravati Andhra's capital

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

The government is likely to introduce a bill in Lok Sabha on Wednesday to recognise Amaravati as the sole and permanent capital of Andhra Pradesh, fulfilling a vital aspiration of key NDA ally TDP and Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu. The legislation will scuttle any future bid to alter the decision of making Amaravati the sole and permanent capital as was done by the state's previous government, led by YSR Congress President YS Jagan Mohan Reddy. On 28 March, the state legislative assembly also passed a resolution requesting Centre for amendment of Section 5 of the Andhra Pradesh Reorgani sation Act to incorporate name of"Amar avati" as the new capital of Andhra Pradesh.—*PTI*

Stir in Odisha Assembly over Dubey's remarks

BHUBANESWAR, 31 MARCH

Opposition members in Odisha protested against BJP MP Nishikant Dubey's alleged insult to former Chief Minister Biju Patnaik, demanding a censure motion. As the House assembled, members of BJD, Congress, and CPI(M) raised slogans and staged protests. Deputy Opposition leader Prasana Acharya called for a debate on the motion, stating, "BJP MP Dubey's statement on Biju Patnaik has shaken the very pride of Odisha." The Speaker said notices would be considered later. BJD MLA Ranendra Pratap Swain requested a motion titled "Defamatory and false statement pronounced against Biju Babu." Outside the House, Odisha Law Minister Prithiviraj Harichandan condemned Dubey's remarks, calling them imprudent and unacceptable. The controversy arose after Dubey claimed Biju Patnaik was linked to the CIA during the 1960s, sparking nationwide outrage. —*PTI*

Kerala NDA manifesto promises free LPG

The party also promises monetary benefits for women, and citizens over 70 years

T'PURAM, 31 MARCH

The BJP-led NDA on Tuesday released its manifesto for the 9 April Kerala Assembly polls, promising monetary benefits for needy women and citizens over 70, two free LPG cylinders per year for poor households, an AIIMS for the state, and the protection of places of worship.

The manifesto, released by BJP National President Nitin Nabin at an NDA event here, also promised a high-speed railway network connecting the state capital with Kannur, 20,000 litres of free water for every household and "water for Tamil Nadu and safety for Kerala" with regard to the Mullaperiyar dam.

In his speech, after releasing the manifesto, Nabin claimed that decades of successive LDF and UDF governments in Kerala resulted in "negligible industrial growth, economic stagnation and fiscal misgovernance in the state".

He alleged that the people had paid a heavy price due to the "match-fixing games" played by the two fronts.

Kerala BJP President Rajeev Chandrasekhar with BJP National President Nitin Nabin and others during the release of NDA's election manifesto for the upcoming Assembly polls, in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, on Tuesday —*PTI*

Giving details of the manifesto, Nabin said that every woman from poor and BPL households will be provided with a Bhakshya Arogya Suraksha Card with a monthly recharge of Rs 2,500, which they can use at pharmacies and grocery stores.

Besides that, a welfare pension of Rs 3,000 per month will be provided to women heads of poor households, widows and senior citizens above the age of 70 years, he said.

Additionally, two free LPG cylinders per year, one each during Onam and Christmas, will be provided to poor families, he said. The manifesto said that it will also end corruption through a time-bound CBI enquiry into the Sabarimala gold theft. —*PTI*

'PM WANTS LDF TO WIN KERALA POLLS'

KANNUR/T'PURAM, 31 MARCH

Alleging a 'partnership' between the CPI(M) and the BJP in Kerala, Congress leader **Rahul Gandhi** on Tuesday claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi wants the ruling LDF to win the April 9 Assembly elections in the southern state.

Addressing an election rally here, Gandhi reiterated his charge that the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) is fighting the combined forces of the Left Democratic Front (LDF) and the BJP.

Two former CPI(M) leaders — V Kunhikrishnan and TK Govindan — who are contesting as independents with the support of the UDF, were also present on the stage.

In Thiruvananthapuram Kerala Chief Minister Vijayan hit back at Rahul Gandhi for targeting the ruling CPI(M) over the Sabarimala gold loss case during a poll campaign,

questioning how the accused in the case had managed to reach the Congress leader's home.

He was referring to a widely circulated photograph in which the prime accused in gold loss cases, Unnikrishnan Potty, accompanied by some senior Congress leaders, was seen with Sonia Gandhi at her residence in Delhi.

Congress leader VD Satheesan said the CPI(M) needs to first explain the photograph. —*PTI*

BJP including outsiders in poll list, says Didi to CEC

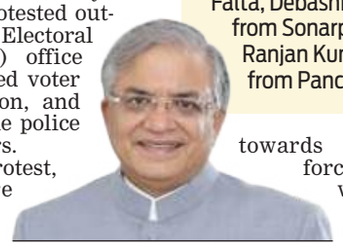
KOLKATA, 31 MARCH

In a strongly-worded letter to Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) **Gyanesh Kumar**, TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday accused BJP of attempting to illegally include voters from outside West Bengal to the state's electoral rolls in bulk by means of Form 6 applications.

She termed the move "another coordinated attempt by the BJP, in conjunction with the Election Commission of India, to interfere with the democratic rights of the people" after the "flawed and seemingly targeted SIR caused severe hardship to millions, pushing many to the brink of disenfranchisement".

Meanwhile, a group of booth-level officers (BLOs), perceived to be backed by the ruling TMC, protested outside the Chief Electoral Officer's (CEO) office here over alleged voter list manipulation, and scuffled with the police and BJP workers.

During the protest, stones were allegedly thrown towards the central forces personnel who were posted as guards. —*PTI*



BJP names 13 more candidates

The BJP on Tuesday announced the names of 13 more candidates for the Bengal assembly polls, including Soma Thakur from the Bagda seat. Shyamal Hati will contest from Howrah Dakshin, Girija Shankar Roy from Natabari and Ashutosh Barma from Sitai. Uttam Kumar Banik will enter the fray from Magrahat Purba, Debangshu Panda from Falta, Debashish Dhar from Sonarpur Uttar & Ranjan Kumar Paul from Panchla. —*PTI*

ASSAM POLL MANIFESTO

BJP vows protection of indigenous people

GUWAHATI, 31 MARCH

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday released the BJP's manifesto for Assam assembly polls, promising protection of land, heritage and dignity of indigenous people and Rs 5 lakh crore infrastructure investment.

BJP's 'Sankalp Patra' comprises 31 promises, including the recovery of encroached land from "Bangladeshi Miyas", bringing in Uniform Civil Code (UCC), and creating employment opportunities for youths.

The manifesto pledged to protect the land, heritage and dignity of the indigenous people of Assam by implementing the Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950, to expedite the process of detection and pushback of illegal immigrants.

The BJP also promised that it would strengthen the legislative protections to preserve the civilisation, heritage and rights of the people of Assam by implementing the UCC, excluding the Sixth Schedule and Tribal areas, to ensure the rights of ethnic communities.

It pledged to "free every inch of land from encroachment by illegal immigrants and provide land rights to all genuine citizens of Assam" under the 'Mission Basundhara' scheme.

The manifesto also assured that the BJP, if it returns to power in Assam, would free the encroached land parcels of Satras, Namghars, Devalayas and other places of worship.

The BJP will also formulate an effective law to end the menace of 'Love Jihad' and take firm measures to tackle the menace of 'Land Jihad', the party's manifesto said.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Union ministers Sarbananda Sonowal and Pabitra Margherita, and other top state leaders were present. —*PTI*

Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, state BJP President Dilip Saikia and Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal in Guwahati —*PTI*

> **Once the BJP returns to power, it will implement the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in the state within three months.**
>
> -Himanta Biswa Sarma, Assam Chief Minister

Cong blames BJP for attack on candidate

Congress candidate from Assam's Naduar assembly constituency, Sunil Kumar Chetry, was attacked by miscreants, allegedly backed by the ruling BJP, during the campaign for the upcoming state polls, a party leader said. The candidate's convoy was attacked in the Napalm bypass of the assembly segment on Monday evening, he said. Chetry, who is pitted against senior BJP leader Padma Hazarika, fell on the ground and was seen groaning before he was taken to a private hospital for treatment. Assam Pradesh Congress President Gaurav Gogoi alleged that the supporters of BJP had carried out the attack. —*PTI*

Catholic bishops' body writes to Shah over FCRA Bill

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India has written to Home Minister **Amit Shah** flagging "serious concerns" over the proposed amendments to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), urging wider consultation and safeguards against "excessive state control over civil society".

In identical communications to Shah and Members of Parliament (MPs) dated 31 March, the CBCI said the FCRA Bill, 2026, while aimed at strengthening oversight, could upset the "constitutional balance, civil society freedom and the future of charitable service in India".

The bishops' body raised particular concern over provisions that would allow foreign contributions and assets created out of such funds to vest in a designated authority not only in cases of cancellation or surrender of FCRA registration but also in cases of "deemed cessation", including non-renewal of licences.

It warned that this expansion could disproportionately affect organisations whose renewals are denied, especially as the renewal process is "totally controlled" by the Home Ministry.

Flagging constitutional issues, the CBCI said the proposed framework raises concerns under Article 300A relating to the right to property, pointing to the "absence of prior judicial determination before such vesting of assets," which it said departs from due process and proportionality.

Further, the body objected to provisions expanding liability to "key functionaries", arguing that this creates a presumption of culpability and could deter voluntary participation in civil society initiatives. —*PTI*

Democratisation of global order underway: Jaishankar

RAJGIR, 31 MARCH

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday observed that a "democratisation of global order" was being witnessed across the world, which was "becoming more multi-polar" since many cultures and societies were "making their voices heard".

The remarks were made in his brief speech to the convocation ceremony of Nalanda University at Rajgir in Bihar.

He added, "the very term Nalanda evokes memories of India's intellectual heritage and cultural grandeur. A revival of that tradition in this institution is an indicator of the rise of not just India but Asia itself". —*PTI*

PM, Shah denying funds sought by TN: DyCM

DHARMAPURI, 31 MARCH

Tamil Nadu Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin on Tuesday took a dig at the "frequent" visits of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah to the state and alleged that they were denying the funds sought by the state.

Neither leader has given any major projects for the state; he alleged and appealed to the people to "banish" BJP from state.

"PM Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah are visiting Tamil Nadu frequently, but they are not giving any projects or even the funds that we ask. The BJP should be ousted from Tamil Nadu," he alleged.

Though the DMK-led alliance lost Harur (to AIADMK) seat during the 2021 polls, the party did not ignore development in the constituency and provided Rs 400 crore worth road infrastructure projects, new buildings in government hospitals, laid roads in hill areas, developed temple town and established Rs 6 crore worth ITI in the constituency, Udayanidhi said. —*PTI*

AHEAD OF WB POLLS

Did BJP pick Paes for his Bengal identity?

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

The induction of tennis legend Leander Paes into BJP ahead of the West Bengal Assembly elections has sparked debate over whether the move is aimed at countering the Trinamool Congress's "Bengali asmita" narrative.

With Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee foregrounding Bengali identity, Paes' entry is seen as an attempt to strengthen the BJP's local connect.

His induction, however, also triggered questions online about his roots.

Often associated with Goa, Paes is in fact a Kolkata native. He was born and raised in the city to a Bengali mother, Jennifer Paes, a former national captain, and a Goan father, Vece Paes, an Olympic bronze medallist.

He is also a descendant of 19th-century Bengali literary figure Michael Madhusudan Dutta.

Educated at La Martiniere and St Xavier's College, Paes took to tennis at five under coach Naresh Kumar before moving to Chennai in 1986 to pursue sport professionally.

One of India's greatest doubles players, Paes won 18 Grand Slam titles across men's and mixed doubles, including the US Open, Wimbledon, Australian Open and French Open. His partnership with Mahesh Bhupathi became one of the most successful in Indian tennis history.

Paes achieved national hero status with a bronze medal in singles at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics and was a mainstay of India's Davis Cup campaigns for over two decades. Honoured with the Khel Ratna, Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan, he was inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame in 2024. —*PTI*

Former tennis player Leander Paes with Union Ministers Kiren Rijiju in New Delhi, on Tuesday —*PTI*

EC OFFICIALS INSPECT STALIN'S CAR

THANJAVUR/ CHENNAI, 31 MARCH

DMK Chief MK Stalin's vehicle was intercepted and checked by the election flying squad here while he was travelling to Tiruvarur district for the election campaign on Tuesday. The inspection took place shortly after Stalin launched his election bid from Tiruvarur. The video clip released by DMK shows Stalin remaining seated in the vehicle while the officials conducted their search.

TVK CHIEF & CADRES BOOKED

TVK Chief Vijay and his party cadres have been booked under various sections of BNS 2023, including alleged violation of Model Code of Conduct regulations during his campaign in the city. —*PTI*

—PTI

Mumbai gets first woman municipal commissioner

MUMBAI, 31 MARCH

Senior IAS officer Ashwini Bhide was appointed as Mumbai's first woman municipal commissioner, an official confirmed today. She will succeed Bhushan Gagrani, who retires on Tuesday. The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), established in 1872, is one of India's oldest local bodies. Bhide, a 1995 batch IAS officer, previously served as Additional Chief Secretary in the Chief Minister's Office and handled key infrastructure projects. An official notification states she will also continue as Managing Director of Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation, where she played a crucial role in expanding the city's metro network. —*PTI*

Bus catches fire in Vijayawada, no casualties

VIJAYAWADA, 31 MARCH

Within a week of a deadly bus fire in Andhra Pradesh, another private air-conditioned bus caught fire, but no casualties or injuries occurred, police confirmed today. The bus, travelling from Visakhapatnam to Hyderabad, experienced a minor fire in the battery area late Monday. Passengers safely deboarded the vehicle on time, with police stating it was "a minor fire, with smoke near the battery area." About 50 passengers were on board, and investigations suggest a battery explosion caused the fire. The passengers escaped unharmed. —*PTI*

—SCREENGRAB

British engineer working for IPL found dead

MUMBAI, 31 MARCH

A 76-year-old British broadcast engineer working with the BCCI for IPL 2026 matches was found unconscious in a south Mumbai hotel and later declared dead, police reported today. Jan William Langford was discovered on Monday morning and rushed to Bombay Hospital, where he was pronounced dead on arrival. The official confirmed Langford was on a work assignment as a broadcast engineer. Nothing suspicious was found in his postmortem report, and a case of unnatural death has been registered. Further inquiries are going on, police added. A Marine Drive police official stated, "nothing suspicious was found in the autopsy." —*PTI*

—WIKIPEDIA

Five glacial lakes pose 'very high' flood risk: J&K CM

JAMMU, 31 MARCH

At least five glacial lakes in the Kashmir Himalaya are identified as having a "very high susceptibility" to glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs), Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said on Tuesday. Speaking in the assembly, Abdullah mentioned a preliminary geospatial analysis mapping downstream exposure in districts like Ganderbal, Shopian, and Kulgam, conducted by the University of Kashmir and published in the Journal of Glaciology. The lakes Bramsar, Chirsar, Nundkol, Gangabal, and Bhagsar are categorised as 'very high susceptibility,' but Abdullah clarified this does not mean an imminent threat —*PTI*

Intel agencies do not collect private data: MHA

MHA downplays concern over use of social media intel

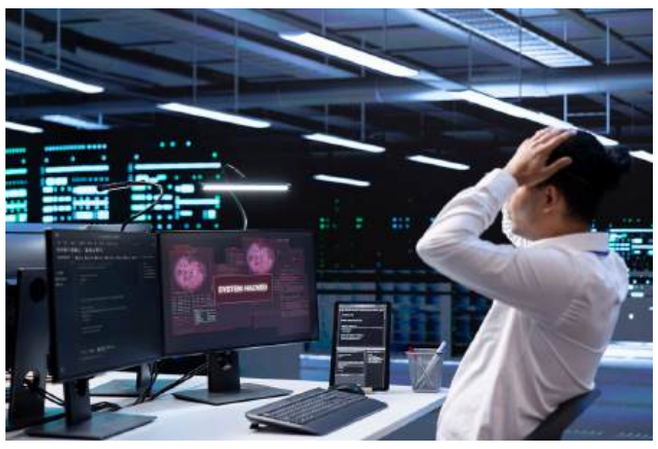
NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

The Union Home Ministry has told a parliamentary panel that security agencies use open-source intelligence from public sources, including social media, to gather information. But there is no breach of privacy as personal data isn't collected.

The ministry's submission was made to the Standing Committee on Communications and IT (2024-25), chaired by LS member Nishikant Dubey, which tabled its report on Monday.

The committee had sought to know from the ministry how it dealt with privacy while scraping the internet.

"Publicly available information on the internet is used for intelligence gathering. No personal information is gathered from social media. So privacy is never violated," the ministry told the panel.



The ministry said the data scraped by security agencies may include tweets, FB posts, YouTube videos, deep fakes or morphed media —*FREEPIK*

Scraping refers to the use of computer programmes (called web scrapers) to automatically browse public web pages, extract info (names, phone numbers, keywords, hashtags, trends, images), store or analyse information for law enforcement or intelligence purposes, it said.

The ministry said the data scraped by security agencies from publicly available sources may include social media posts like public tweets, Facebook posts, YouTube videos, deep fakes or morphed media, fake news or misinformation, including viral content spreading communal hatred. Scraping may be used to collect hashtags and trends from YouTube channels and Telegram groups, to check for radical content or bomb-making tutorials. It said the technique may be used to monitor scam websites or links to online gambling sites, fake job scams and fake investment scams.

It may be used on matrimonial and dating platforms for honey traps or fraud, and from dark web marketplaces for the extraction of cryptocurrency wallet addresses, it said.

The ministry told the panel that AI is being used for intelligence gathering and counter-intelligence. —*PTI*

FOCUS NOW ON DEVELOPMENT

35 Naxals surrender in Ch'garh hours before deadline

RAIPUR, 31 MARCH

Thity five Naxalites surrendered in Chhattisgarh hours before the Centre-set deadline for LWE eradication ended With Naxalism "completely eliminated" in Chhattisgarh by the March 31 deadline, the state government is now focused on Bastar's development preserving its tribal culture, Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma said.

The region's economy would be strengthened through minor forest produce and women-led self-help groups, Sharma, who also holds the Home portfolio, said on Monday. On Bastar's development roadmap, he said there is no blueprint yet, but, the focus is clear.

On promises for Bastar, especially in comparison to the state's tribal-dominated Surguja region, which got rid of the Naxal menace over a decade ago but still faces development challenges, he said there is no place in the world where development is ever complete.

"Tell me any place, in London or the United States, where there is no scope for further development. Development is a continuous process...it will keep happening, whether in Bastar or Surguja," he stated.

He also stressed that lack of development and insurgency should not be linked.

Sharma said sustained efforts would be required to transform Bastar.

As Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai stated in the Assembly, there is absolutely no substance in the rumours about increasing mining in Bastar, he asserted. —*PTI*

Calcutta HC rejects PIL on transfers of WB officers by EC

KOLKATA, 31 MARCH

The Calcutta High Court dismissed a PIL challenging the transfer of administrative and police officers by the poll panel in West Bengal, saying the petitioner could not establish that the actions were arbitrary and had hurt public interest.

The Election Commission had transferred several officers, including the chief secretary, the home secretary and the DGP, after announcing the schedule for assembly polls.

The petitioner claimed that these large-scale transfers would affect the functioning of the state's administration, and sought that the poll panel's orders be set aside.

Dismissing the petition, a division bench presided by Chief Justice Sujoy Paul held

that the petitioner could not establish that the Election Commission of India used its power to transfer officers in an arbitrary manner, which resulted in any damage to public interest.

It noted that the petitioner, Arka Kumar Nag, made an effort to establish a nexus between certain senior politicians and Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar.

However, the ECI's counsel, DS Naidu, submitted that no such persons against whom allegations of connivance or pressure tactics, as alleged, were impleaded by name.

Holding that no allegation of malice can be entertained against the poll panel, the high court observed that "apart from bald pleadings, no material could be placed to establish any such nexus."

Holding that transfer is a part of service, the division bench said that if a transfer order runs contrary to any statutory provision, the aggrieved employee or officer can assail it in appropriate proceedings. The court, however, said that this judgment will not come in the way of the individual aggrieved officers to challenge their transfer order in appropriate proceedings in accordance with the law. — *PTI*

Wife cries foul over decision to probe Chandy's death

KOTTAYAM, 31 MARCH

Mariamma Oommen, wife of former Kerala chief minister Oommen Chandy, claimed on Tuesday that there was a "conspiracy" behind the Kerala government's decision in 2023 to constitute a medical board to look into her husband's illness. Mariamma told a TV channel that her husband had only a throat problem, but the government set up a board based on someone's complaint and without consulting the family or Chandy himself.

She also claimed that it was a move targeted against her son, Chandy Oommen.

She said that the government did not ask her or her husband if they had any complaints regarding the treatment.

A six-member medical board comprising doctors from various departments had been set up in February 2023 to review Chandy's medical condition and treatment at a private hospital in Thiruvananthapuram.

The team was formed following allegations by some relatives regarding the former CM's treatment. Chandy had later posted a video on his son's FB page claiming that he was being properly taken care of by his family and the party.

Chandy's 42 close relatives, including his younger brother, had sent a letter to the CM seeking urgent intervention to provide better treatment to Chandy. — *PTI*

Transperson's kin booked for minister's 'doctored' video

MUMBAI, 31 MARCH

The Mumbai police registered a case against the brother of a transperson in connection with the circulation of an alleged AI-doctored video featuring Maharashtra Minister Narhari Zirwal, an official said on Tuesday. Zirwal landed in controversy last week after an "objectionable" video of him surfaced on social media. The video showed the Minister in a compromising position with a transperson at his official residence.

The transperson lodged a police complaint a couple of days ago, alleging that a few videos of her were recorded a few months ago, and these were doctored using artificial intelligence, the official said.

The transperson's brother allegedly made the video viral for blackmail, he said. — *PTI*

EX-JAWAN KILLED HIS WIFE

LPG booking leads to killer's arrest after 4 years

FAZILKA, 31 MARCH

An LPG cylinder booking helped the police to nab a former Captain of the Indian Army, who had been on the run for four years after his conviction was upheld by the Punjab and Haryana High Court in his wife's murder case.

Sandeep Tomar was arrested from Pandhurna district in Madhya Pradesh and was produced before a court here, which sent him to judicial custody on Saturday.

Tomar was posted in Abohar in 2013 when he allegedly killed his wife, Shveta Singh.

He initially attempted to describe the incident as suicide, but an investigation revealed it to be a planned murder.

The court awarded him life imprisonment in 2014, a verdict that was later upheld by the Punjab and Haryana HC in 2022.

Tomar was granted bail in 2019, but did not surrender after the high court upheld his sentence in 2022.

The high court ordered the Punjab DGP to file an affidavit by 8 April, explaining the steps taken to nab Tomar.

- The breakthrough came when the Fazilka police traced a bank account linked to Tomar's PAN card, which he had used to book an LPG cylinder. Tomar was arrested from the Pandhurna district in Madhya Pradesh

The breakthrough came when the Fazilka police traced a bank account linked to Tomar's PAN card, which he had used to book an LPG cylinder. — *PTI*

Man smashes boy's head after fight with kid's dad

MUMBAI, 31 MARCH

A fight over a minor issue turned gruesome when a man threw a four-year-old boy to the ground and smashed his head on an iron rod after arguing with his father in Maharashtra's Vasai.

The brutal incident took place in a housing complex and was captured on CCTV.

The video shows the boy, Vignesh, wearing a yellow t-shirt, sitting in an auto-rickshaw and playing with other children. The accused, Sandeep Pawar, who had a fight with the child's father, over a minor issue, walked to Vignesh and pulled him out by his legs. Pawar, who can be seen wearing a blue shirt and black pants, threw him on the ground once and smashed his head on an iron rod, and threw him down again to avenge the fight with the boy's father.

The boy was rushed to a hospital in Mira Road, where he is in ICU. His condition is critical, officials said.

The accused was arrested, and a case has been filed against him, officials added. —*Agencies*

Army response sought on religious articles seized during Op Blue Star

CHANDIGARH, 31 MARCH

The Punjab and Haryana High Court has issued notices to the Army, the Centre and the CBI on a plea seeking directions for the disclosure of manuscripts, religious books and other articles allegedly seized during Operation Blue Star and handed over to the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC).

A division bench of Chief Justice Sheel Nagu and Justice Ramesh Kumari

passed these directions on Monday while hearing the plea filed by a Ludhiana resident in 2019.

The petitioner sought directions to the SGPC to reveal the whereabouts of the religious texts, manuscripts and other articles that were seized during Operation Blue Star and given to the SGPC.

Operation Blue Star was a military operation undertaken between 1 June and 10 June 1984, against Bhindranwale-led armed militants who were camping on the premises of the Golden Temple in Amritsar.

In November 2019, the HC had issued a notice of motion to the SGPC. But during subsequent hearings, the SGPC stated that some items were returned and some were still in the possession of the CBI, the Centre and the Army. — *PTI*

Chanchal Kumar is now secretary of I&B Ministry

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

Senior IAS officer Chanchal Kumar has been appointed as Information and Broadcasting Secretary in a bureaucratic reshuffle on Tuesday. Twenty-five civil servants have been appointed in Central departments as additional secretaries in Tuesday's rejig. Kumar, a 1992 batch IAS officer of the Bihar cadre, is currently Secretary, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER).

Sanjay Lohiya, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Mines has been appointed as the Special Secretary of the Department of Financial Services, in the Ministry of Finance.

He will take over as Secretary, Department of Financial Services, after the superannuation of Nagaraju Maddirala on 31 May, an order issued by the Personnel Ministry said.

Abhishek Singh, Director General, National Informatics Centre, has been named as the Director General, National Testing Agency, in the Ministry of Education. Singh is a 1995 batch IAS officer of the Nagaland cadre.

Tourism Secretary Srivatsa Krishna has been appointed as the Secretary, of the Ministry of Minority Affairs in place of Chandra Sekhar. — *PTI*

'NO PLACE FOR VIOLENCE'

Dalai Lama backs Pope Leo's call for peace amid Iran war

DHARMASALA, 31 MARCH

Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama endorsed the appeal for peace made by Pope Leo XIV.

In a message issued from Dharamsala on Tuesday, the Buddhist leader emphasised that "violence has no place in any spiritual tradition," highlighting the shared values of compassion, tolerance, and harmony across religions.

Endorsing the Pope's call made during the Palm Sunday Mass in St. Peter's Square, the Dalai Lama said "the appeal for renouncing violence deeply resonated him, as it speaks to the very essence of what all major religions teach."

"Violence finds no true home in any of these teachings," he

said, noting that all faiths like Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism and Judaism, share the message of love, compassion, tolerance and self-discipline.

He stressed that lasting solutions to conflicts like the one in West Asia must be based on dialogue. "History has shown us time and again that violence only begets more violence and cannot be the foundation for peace," he added. Pope said in his Palm Sunday homily that God is the "king of peace" who rejects violence and comforts the oppressed. — *PTI*

High temperatures linked to fewer male births

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

Exposure to high temperatures during pregnancy could be linked to a decline in male births, according to an analysis of five million births across India and 33 countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

Researchers, led by those at the UK's University of Oxford, linked data from large-scale surveys with temperature records to examine how exposure to heat during pregnancy can impact the sex ratio at birth. In sub-Saharan Africa, exposure to high temperatures during the first trimester of pregnancy was linked to a decline in male births.

However, in India, effects due to heat exposure appear later in pregnancy, with higher temperatures during the second trimester associated with fewer male births, especially among older mothers.

Published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS), evidence from the study has important implications for population health and gender balance, the researchers said.

Lead author Abdel Ghany, postdoctoral research fellow in sociology at the University of Oxford, said, "Extreme heat is not only a major public health threat. We show that temperature shapes human reproduction by influencing who is born." — *PTI*

To shore up global crude oil supplies, the US has temporarily eased sanctions on Russian oil shipments already at sea — first for India, then for the rest of the world —PTI

Asian nations seek more Russian oil as Iran war strains supplies

Asian nations are increasingly competing for Russian crude oil as an energy crisis mounts amid the month-old war by the US and Israel against Iran, which has choked off roughly a fifth of the world's oil supply.

Much of the oil from the mostly shut Strait of Hormuz was headed for Asia, hit hardest by recent energy shocks. Over the weekend, Iran-backed Houthi rebels entered the conflict, further threatening shipping.

To shore up global crude oil supplies, the US has temporarily eased sanctions on Russian oil shipments already at sea — first for India, then for the rest of the world.

Demand is rising in Asia while Russia is raking in billions of dollars. But experts say there is a limit to how much Moscow can boost its exports of crude oil, which is unrefined petroleum needed to make fuels like gasoline and diesel, and it is already exporting at a level close to its previous peak.

In addition, Russia's 4-year-old full-scale invasion of Ukraine and recent drone attacks on its energy facilities by Kyiv are hurting its export capabilities.

For desperate countries in Asia the opportunity is short-lived and shrinking, said Muyu Xu, a senior crude oil analyst at the global trade data firm Kpler.

"The real problem is how much cargo is still available in this market," she said.

A FLURRY OF INTEREST

Before the Iran war, China, India and Turkey were the main importers of Russian oil, flouting Western sanctions for a healthy discount.

US and European Union sanctions were meant to economically hinder Russia after its invasion of Ukraine.

But the US sanction waiver sent energy-hungry Southeast Asia into a flurry. This month, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam signaled new interest in Russian oil.

Manila, a long-time US ally, imported Russian crude for the first time in five years — days after it declared an energy emergency.

Others may follow, but will compete with China and India for roughly 126 million barrels still at sea, according to Kpler.

India alone typically needs 5.5 million to 6 million barrels of oil per day.

Analysts say Russia is unlikely to boost exports sharply. In March, flows were about 3.8 million barrels a day, above February's 3.2 million but still below the mid-2023 peak of 3.9 million.

Xu said the crisis was a reminder of how quickly geopolitics can shift — sometimes driven by just a few decision-makers — making it hard for countries to plan ahead. She said "right now, really the priority is to ensure your supply and all the other considerations are secondary."

Southeast Asian countries competing for the dwindling amount of Russian crude oil at sea are likely hoping the US extends its sanction waiver beyond April, Xu added.

The options are limited for these nations, and safer bets — like crude oil from the US, South America or West Africa — are too far for Asia, meaning shipments won't arrive for months. That leaves poorer nations scrambling.

A SQUEEZE IN THE PHILIPPINES

Airlines in the Philippines are weighing fuel rationing. Cash handouts are being rushed to those hit hardest, like transportation workers. On most days, lines at gas stations stretch for blocks.

The nation of 117 million is an early warning for Southeast Asia.

Before the war, the Philippines relied on the Middle East for nearly 97% of its total seaborne oil imports, according to Kpler data. The energy emergency declaration is a "new frontier" in its scale and magnitude, said Kairos Dela Cruz of the Institute for Climate and Sustainable Cities.

"It will definitely drive people down even further in the poverty line," he said.

To ease energy shortfalls, the Philippines imported crude oil, a first since 2021. Other Southeast Asian nations are weighing similar options.

Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh's March 23 visit to Russia included agreements on oil and gas cooperation, alongside nuclear energy, as rising diesel prices begin to squeeze Vietnam's manufacturing sector.

In Indonesia, officials said "all countries are possible" partners as they shore up reserves. This includes Russia and the tiny oil and gas sultanate of Brunei, said Indonesian Energy Minister Bahlil Lahadalia.

"When you don't have any other options, all options are on the table," said Putra Adhiguna of the Jakarta-based Energy Shift Institute.

While weighing similar moves, Thailand is not as desperate as the Philippines, said Jitsai Santaputra of the energy consultancy The Lantau Group in Bangkok. She added that Thailand will likely wait and see so long as the impact is limited.

But it's growing.

Fuel prices in Thailand jumped on March 26 after caps and subsidies were lifted, with most fuels rising about 20 US cents per liter, with diesel up roughly 18% — a hit to industry and transportation that risks pushing up the price of other goods.

CHINA AND INDIA HAVE THE ADVANTAGE

Defying Western sanctions, China and India were major Russian crude oil customers before the US and Israel attacked Iran on 28 February.

An additional advantage for India was having US sanctions on Russian crude oil removed about a week before other countries.

"They took that chance and snapped up quite many cargoes," Xu said. By the time US President Donald Trump allowed everybody else to buy, she said it was "already a bit too late because most of the cargo had already been ordered" by China and India.

Even with the head start, Kpler data shows India's crude oil imports from Russia probably aren't enough to offset the lack of supplies from the Middle East.

Its oil imports from Russia jumped to roughly 1.9 million barrels a day in March, from about 1 million barrels before the Iran war. Before that conflict, India imported around 2.6 million barrels per day of crude oil from the Middle East.

That may not be enough, with the approach of peak summer energy demand, driven by travel, agriculture and freight needs, especially as emergency oil stockpiles run down, said Duttatreya Das of the think tank Ember. He added that short-term buys cover only a few days of supply, leaving any gap hard to fill without extra shipments from the US or Canada.

"I don't know how the shortfall will be met," he said.

Despite being the fifth-largest crude producer and pushing clean energy, China still has strong oil demand from its 1.4 billion people. But it also has built a vast oil stockpile.

It has approximately 1.2 billion barrels of onshore crude inventories, Kpler estimates. That is nearly four months of its overall seaborne crude imports, which cushion short term impacts from the war.

China sourced about 13% of its seaborne crude from Iran, according to Kpler, and roughly 20% from Russia, said financial data group LSEG.

With ample reserves and deep pockets, analysts say some Russian shipments bound for China could be diverted to more desperate countries.

"Russia emerges as a major winner from the entire conflict," said Sam Reynolds of the US-based Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis. Given the energy crisis, speed of delivery and temporarily lower prices, he said Asia has "a much larger incentive to import Russian oil."

"We can argue whether there's a moral dilemma there, but I think it's a reflection of the fact that countries are going to do whatever they need to to protect their energy security," he said. —PTI

SALAR

The political pitch: Athletes and their second innings

Tennis legend Leander Paes' decision to switch to the BJP after a five-year association with the Trinamool Congress brought back the spotlight on sportspersons in politics on Tuesday.

While some rose high to become cabinet ministers, some others garnered mixed results electorally and are still finding their way. PTI takes a glance at some prominent names who made the daring career shift.

MOHAMMAD AZHARUDDIN

The former Indian cricket captain joined Congress in 2009 and became an Lok Sabha member from Moradabad, UP in the same year. But he lost the subsequent Lok Sabha and assembly elections in 2014 and 2023. After a brief stint as Hyderabad Cricket Association chief, Azhar was drafted in as a cabinet minister in Revanth Reddy's dispensation in Telangana, holding the portfolio of Minister for Public Enterprises & Minority Welfare.

NAVJOT SINGH SIDHU

The former India opener worked in multiple parties -- BJP, Congress and his very own Aawaz-e-Punjab. He won the 2004 and 2009 general elections on a BJP ticket. But in 2017, he joined Congress and won the assembly election from Amritsar East.

In the 2022 state polls he lost to his AAP rival from the same constituency. Right now, he is on a political sabbatical.

RAJYAVARDHAN SINGH RATHORE

The ace shooter, who fetched India's first-ever shooting silver in Olympics, joined BJP in 2013 and was elected to Lok Sabha in the 2014 general elections from Jaipur. He won in the 2019 polls as well. In 2023, he shifted to state politics and won the election that year, subsequently resigning from Lok Sabha.

SAINA NEHWAL

The former World No. 1 and London Olympics bronze winning badminton ace joined the BJP in 2020 along with her sister but is yet to try her fortunes in elections.

GAUTAM GAMBHIR

The two-time World Cup winner and the current coach of India's cricket team entered politics through BJP in 2019. In the same year, he won the general election from East Delhi. But in 2024, he moved away from active politics to revive his sporting career as a cricket coach.

KIRTI AZAD

The 1983 World Cup-winner first entered politics through BJP and won an assembly and Lok Sabha election from Darbhanga, Bihar.

But in 2015, Azad was suspended by BJP for his tiff with senior leader Arun Jaitely and he moved to Congress later in 2019. In 2021, he moved to Trinamool Congress, and returned to the lower house through a victory from the Bardhaman-Durgapur constituency in West Bengal.

VINESH PHOGAT AND BAJRANG PUNIA

The accomplished and equally controversial wrestlers joined the Congress party together in 2024 after agitating aggressively against the then Wrestling Federation of India chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, a BJP leader who was accused of sexual harassment.

Phogat went on to become an MLA in Haryana after winning the Julana constituency, while Punia was appointed the head of All India Kisan Congress by the party.

VIJENDER SINGH

The Beijing Olympics bronze-winning boxer came to politics through Congress in 2019 but lost the election that year from the South Delhi constituency. Later in 2024, he shifted to BJP.

BHAICHUNG BHUTIA

The former Indian football captain joined Trinamool Congress in 2014 but lost the general elections from Darjeeling. However, during the 2021 Bengal assembly elections he supported the Left front. Later, he formed his own party Hamaro Sikkim but could not make any impact in polls.

HARBHAJAN SINGH

The former India spinner, who has two World Cups and over 400 Test wickets in his kitty, joined politics with Aam Aadmi Party in 2022. Later, he was nominated to Rajya Sabha by AAP.

YOGESHWAR DUTT

Dutt, a bronze winner in the London Olympics, joined BJP in 2019 and remains an active worker.

DILIP TIRKEY

The former Indian hockey captain joined Biju Janata Dal in 2012 and got a nomination to Rajya Sabha. But he could not win polls to the lower house in 2024 from the Sundergarh constituency.

—PTI

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Israel approves death penalty for convicted Palestinian 'murderers'

Israel's Parliament on Monday passed a law approving the death penalty for Palestinians convicted of murdering Israelis, a measure that has been harshly condemned by the international community and rights groups as discriminatory and inhumane.

The passage of the bill marked the culmination of a yearslong drive by the far-right to escalate punishment for Palestinians convicted of nationalistic offences against Israelis. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu came to the Knesset to vote for the bill in person.

The law makes the death penalty, by hanging, the default punishment for West Bank Palestinians convicted of nationalistic killings. It also gives Israeli courts the option of imposing the death penalty on Israeli citizens convicted on similar charges, language that legal experts say effectively confines those who can be sentenced to death to Palestinian citizens of Israel and excludes Jewish citizens.

It will not apply retroactively to any prisoners Israel currently holds, including the Hamas-led militants who attacked the country on October 7, 2023, triggering the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip.

After the final 62-48 vote in favour, lawmakers erupted into cheers and stood up in jubilation. Netanyahu, who remained in his seat, did not immediately react or speak.

Israel's firebrand minister of national security, Itamar Ben-Gvir, who spearheaded the push for the legislation, brandished a bottle in celebration. Far-right lawmaker Limor Son Har-Melech, one of the bill's original sponsors whose first husband was killed in a Palestinian militant attack in the West Bank, smiled through tears.

THE LAW WILL FACE LEGAL CHALLENGES

The legislation, which says it will take effect in 30 days, is certain to face legal challenges that may stall its implementation.

Minutes after the bill passed, the Association of Civil Rights in Israel said it had already petitioned Israel's highest court to challenge the law. It called the legislation "discriminatory by design" and said the parliament had enacted it "without legal authority" over West Bank Palestinians, who are not Israeli citizens.

Amichai Cohen, a senior fellow at the Israel Democracy Institute's Centre for Democratic Values and Institutions, said that under international law, Israel's parliament should not be legislating in the West Bank, which is not sovereign Israeli territory.

Many in Netanyahu's far-right coalition seek to annex the West Bank to Israel.

The law makes the death penalty, by hanging, the default punishment for West Bank Palestinians convicted of nationalistic killings —PTI

CONCERNS RAISED IN THE KNESSET

The vote capped a daylong debate in the parliament. During earlier deliberations, lawmakers raised other concerns, including how the bill does not allow clemency, contradicting international conventions. Opposition lawmakers at times appeared to plead with their colleagues to vote against the bill.

Before the vote, Ben Gvir described the law as long overdue and a sign of strength and national pride.

"From today, every terrorist will know, and the whole world will know, that whoever takes a life, the State of Israel will take their life," he told lawmakers. On his lapel, he wore a signature pin, a small metal noose.

Gilad Kariv, of the Labour Party, condemned the bill's stipulation that a unanimous judgment is not required to impose the death sentence.

"A law in which a person can be sentenced to death without a unanimous conviction. Is this justice in your eyes? Is this the sanctity of life that Israeli tradition has taught us?" he asked.

The bill contravenes international law, he added, and risks turning Israeli soldiers and prison guards into "war criminals against their will."

Some, like Aida Sliman of Hadash, the leftist Jewish-Arab political party, left the chamber in dismay before the votes were complete.

WHAT DOES THE BILL SAY?

Experts say the legislation has two key elements that will effectively limit the death penalty to Palestinians.

First, the bill makes the death penalty a default punishment for nationalistic killings in military courts, which try only West Bank Palestinians and not Israeli citizens. It says that only in special circumstances can military judges change the sentence to life imprisonment.

It gives Israeli civilian courts a greater degree of leniency in sentencing, with judges having the option to choose between the death penalty and life imprisonment.

The second element is how the bill defines the offence punishable by death: killing that rejects the existence of the state of Israel.

"It will apply in Israeli courts, but only to terrorist activities that are motivated by the wish to undermine the existence of Israel. That means Jews will not be indicted under this law," Cohen said.

The foreign ministers of Australia, Britain, France, Germany and Italy released a statement Sunday urging Israel to abandon plans to pass the law, calling it "de facto discriminatory," and saying the death penalty was unethical and had no "deterring effect."

THE BILL BREAKS WITH ISRAELI HISTORY

Though Israel technically has the death penalty on the books as a possible punishment for acts of genocide, espionage during wartime and certain terror offences, the country hasn't put anyone to death since Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann in 1962.

The Public Committee against Torture in Israel says the state has consistently voted in favour of abolishing the death penalty at the UN. Israel's Shin Bet's security agency had — until recently — objected to the practice, believing it could spur further revenge plots by Palestinian militants. Some opposition lawmakers worry that the bill could harm future hostage negotiations. —PTI

— LINKEDIN/MANGALA-KUPPA

Indian-origin Kuppa made CIO of US Labour Dept

HOUSTON, 31 MARCH

Indian-origin technology leader Mangala Kuppa has been appointed as the Chief Information Officer (CIO) of the US Department of Labour, after serving as acting CIO since October. She also holds the position of Chief Artificial Intelligence Officer. Kuppa will oversee IT strategy, digital transformation, and AI adoption. She expressed gratitude on LinkedIn for the opportunity to serve. With over 25 years of experience, she has contributed to modernising the department, developing AI strategies, expanding data platforms, and enhancing cybersecurity. Kuppa, who studied at SNDT Women's University, has held senior roles since joining in 2010, reflecting the rising prominence of Indian-origin professionals in US government technology leadership. —*PTI*

Florida Airport to be renamed after Trump

WASHINGTON, 31 MARCH

Palm Beach International Airport will be renamed after President Donald Trump, signed into law by Governor Ron DeSantis. The change takes effect in July. Trump posted a video revealing plans for a Miami skyscraper housing his presidential library, featuring a tower with Trump branding, a replica Oval Office, rooftop gardens, and a large golden Trump statue. Designed by Bermello Ajamil, the building will include a large ballroom and a presidential jet. The library's site, donated by Miami Dade College, is valued at over USD 67 million. Trump's son Eric praised it as "one of the most beautiful buildings ever built" and "an icon on the Miami skyline." —*PTI*

Nepal's ex-official arrested over Gen Z crackdown

KATHMANDU, 31 MARCH

Former Kathmandu chief district officer Chhabi Rijal was arrested for his alleged role in suppressing Nepal's Gen Z movement in September last year, which led to 76 deaths. Police took Rijal from his residence in Subidhanagar. The arrest follows the detention of ex-Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli and former Home Minister Ramesh Lekhak. A probe report recommended legal action against Oli and Lekhak. The Supreme Court refused interim relief for Oli amid ongoing protests. Oli's wife's habeas corpus petition was dismissed. Oli and Lekhak have been in judicial custody since Sunday. The new government plans to implement the probe report's recommendations. —*PTI*

— X

27 missing after raft sinks in Indonesian waters

PALU, 31 MARCH

Indonesian rescue teams are searching for 27 people believed to be drifting on a raft after their boat sank in rough seas. The vessel, Nazila 05, departed Taliabu port and sank after high waves broke its bow. The captain reported the vessel sank after being hit by waves; all 27 evacuated using a longboat. Relatives say victims tied themselves to a raft, now unlocated. Search vessels and local fishermen assist, and a rescue operation is ongoing. Indonesia's archipelago faces frequent boat accidents due to lax safety standards and overcrowding, with boats being a vital transport mode. —*PTI*

Massive blasts after US dropped bombs on Isfahan, Iran, claiming to hit nuclear facilities —*SCREENGRAB*

US-Israel bomb Iran's nuclear facilities

Analysts say all of Iran's uranium hit; Tehran to strike tech cos

DUBAI, 31 MARCH

US strikes hit a city on Tuesday that is home to one of Iran's main nuclear sites, sending a massive fireball into the sky.

Reports claimed that the US used 2,000-pound bunker buster bombs to strike the city of Isfahan. The central city is home to one of three nuclear enrichment sites that was attacked by the US in a 12-day war in June.

A satellite image taken just before the June war suggests Tehran transferred a truckload of highly enriched uranium to a nuclear facility about 20km from Tuesday's strikes. Analysts believe the truck — which the image showed going into a tunnel loaded with 18 blue containers — likely carried most or all of Iran's stockpile of uranium enriched up to 60 per cent purity. That's a short, technical step to weapons-grade levels.

Hosseinieh Azam Zanjan Mosque in Iran, which hosts one of the largest Muharram processions annually, was damaged —*IRAN RED CRESCENT*

US President Donald Trump, who has vacillated between insisting there is progress in diplomatic talks with Iran and threatening to widen the war, shared footage of the attack on Isfahan, much to the dismay of Iranian officials, who said that he was taking pleasure in the death of civilians.

Meanwhile an Iranian drone hit a fully loaded Kuwaiti oil tanker in waters off the United Arab Emirates city of Dubai, sparking a blaze that was later put out, the Dubai Media Office said. Authorities said no oil spill resulted.

Four people were also wounded when debris from an intercepted drone fell into a residential area in Dubai as blasts continued.

Air raid sirens sounded in Bahrain, while Saudi Arabia said it intercepted three ballistic missiles launched toward its capital.

Loud explosions were also heard in Israel.

Iran also said it will strike offices of 18 American companies, including Microsoft, Apple, Google, Intel, Tesla, Nvidia, Oracle, JP Morgan, and Boeing on 1 April, at 8.00pm Iran time.

The IRGC said that artificial intelligence (AI) and internet communication technology (ICT) services by the companies were the main elements in designing the strikes on Iran.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said Israel was "unashamedly" bombing pharmaceutical companies. "Their intentions are clear. What they've gotten wrong is that they're not dealing with defenceless Palestinian civilians," he said, lauding Iran's armed forces. —*Agencies*

Gas prices soar past $4/gallon in US, highest since 2022

NEW YORK/ PARIS/SAO PAULO/COLOMBO, 31 MARCH

US gas prices jumped past an average of USD 4 a gallon for the first time since 2022 on Tuesday as the Iran war pushed fuel prices to soar worldwide.

According to motor club AAA, the national average for a gallon of regular gasoline is now USD 4.02 — over a dollar more than before the war began. The last time US drivers were collectively paying this much at the pump was nearly four years ago, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The price is a national average, meaning drivers in some states have been paying well over USD 4 a gallon for a while now. Prices vary from state to state.

This may soon impact the price of groceries.

INFLATION RISES IN EUROPE

Europe's inflation rate rose to 2.5 per cent in March, according to official figures released on Tuesday. The rate for the 21 countries using the euro currency was 1.9 per cent in February. Energy prices increased 4.9 per cent in March compared to a 3.1 per cent decline in February.

BRAZIL FLOATS WITH DUAL-FUEL FLEET

Brazil is partially shielded from the crisis as drivers can choose between filling their tank with 100 per cent sugarcane-based ethanol or a gasoline blend that contains 30 per cent of biofuel.

This dual-fuel fleet has limited Brazil's gasoline price rise just 5 per cent in March — compared to 30 per cent in the US.

LANKA RAISES ELECRICITY PRICES

Sri Lanka has decided to increase electricity prices by 8.5 per cent, from 1 April.

The government said that by 3 pm all air conditioners must be switched off at all state institutions.

All advertising hoardings illuminated must be switched off by 8 pm. Earlier this month, fuel rationing system based on a QR code was introduced. —*PTI*

- This is the highest gas prices have reached in the US since Russia invasion of Ukraine nearly four years ago. The price has risen by over 30 per cent since US and Israel attacked Iran

Finish Iran off before ending war: Gulf countries tell Trump privately

WASHINGTON, 31 MARCH

Gulf nations, led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, are urging Trump to continue prosecuting the war against Iran, arguing that Tehran hasn't been weakened enough, according to US, Gulf and Israeli officials.

Officials from Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait and Bahrain are making the case that the moment offers an opportunity to cripple Tehran's clerical rule forever. The countries had earlier warned that a war could devaste the region.

The UAE is also pushing for a ground invasion, which Kuwait and Bahrain favour. Oman and Qatar, however, favour a diplomatic solution.

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said Trump might ask Arab countries to cover the cost of the war, estimated to be in the tens of billions of dollars. —*Agencies*

Arab nations stand to lose from war:

$200B
loss in GDP (3.7 to 6.0 percent of the collective GDP).

3.6 million
jobs may be lost.

4% rise
in unemployment.

4 million
may be pushed into poverty.

Trump mulls pulling out of Iran war without opening Hormuz

WASHINGTON, 31 MARCH

US President Donald Trump has told his aides that he's willing to end the military operation against Iran even if the Strait of Hormuz remains largely closed, leaving the campaign to reopen it for a later date, the Wall Street Journal reported, citing administration officials.

In recent days, Trump and his aides assessed that a mission to pry open the chokepoint would push the conflict beyond his timeline of four to six weeks, the Daily said in a report.

According to the report, Trump decided that the US should achieve its main goals of hobbling Iran's navy and its missile stocks and wind down

current hostilities while pressuring Tehran diplomatically to resume the free flow of trade.

If that fails, Washington would press allies in Europe and the Gulf to take the lead on reopening the strait, the WSJ said, quoting officials.

Nearly a fifth of the world's oil used to pass through the Strait.

However, it is worth noting that Trump has consistently offered contradictory military objectives.

Meanwhile, Defence Secretary Pete Hegsethsaid that Trump is willing to make a deal, and the terms are known to Iran.

"If Iran is not willing, then the US will continue with even greater intensity," Hegseth said.

Meanwhile, Pakistan and China released a five-point memorandum calling for a ceasefire and the free movement through the Strait, among other proposals.

Iran has rejected Pakistan's previous bid to host direct talks with the US, saying that Washington is an untrustworthy negotiator. —*Agencies*

'Why go through Hormuz? Build pipeline to Israel'

TEL AVIV, 31 MARCH

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has suggested that rerouting energy pipelines toward the Mediterranean using Israeli ports could serve as a long-term solution to the vulnerabilities surrounding the Strait of Hormuz.

"I think these are interesting ideas — to divert all the energy pipelines, oil and gas from the Gulf, where the Iranians have a geographic choke point, westward across Saudi Arabia to the Red Sea and up to the Mediterranean ports, our ports in Israel," he said in an interview. "And therefore, you just get around the geographic choke point."

Notably, Netanyahu said that Iran's position gives it the ability to threaten global energy flows. "A military solution might offer short-term stability," he said, but indicated that a deal or structural shift that diminishes the Strait's importance would be more effective in the long run.

"There are things that I hear from the Arab countries and from the US as well," he added. —*Agencies*

IN BRIEF

'Hegseth didn't want deal with BlackRock'

The Pentagon denied allegations that Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth or his representatives attempted to make a multi-million-dollar investment in weapons companies – such as BlackRock - in the run-up to the war on Iran. Chief Pentagon spokesperson Sean Parnell demanded a retraction from the Financial Times's article.

Italy doesn't let US use its Sigonella base

Italy refused permission for US military aircrafts to land at Sigonella base in Sicily before heading to West Asia, sources said. Reports suggested that authorisation was withheld as the US had not requested the use of the airbases. Italy has tried to distance itself from the US' war on Iran, despite several defence treaties.

Israel dumps sewage in Gaza stream

Israel opened the sewage dam into the Wadi Gaza stream, polluting the waterway and causing untreated waste to mix with seawater, reports claimed. The Wadi Gaza is a seasonal wetland and waterway, and one of the most significant surface water sources in Gaza. If true, this could severely cause health issues to Palestinian communities in the area.

'Russian Chechen forces ready to repel US ground invasion'

TEHRAN, 31 MARCH

Iran's state-run Press TV stated that Russian Chechen units are ready to be deployed to Iran in the event of a "US ground invasion".

Trump has publicly flirted with the idea of a ground invasion, and thousands of US troops have been redeployed in the region.

Iranian envoy to the UN Amir Saeid Iravani also wrote to the UN Secretary General and accused Kyiv of supporting the US-Israeli aggression against the Islamic Republic. Press TV said that Ukraine was tying the fate of its war with Russia to the Iran war.

The Chechen fighters,, operate under Ramzan Kadyrov in the semi-autonomous region and form part of Russia's security apparatus. —*Agencies*

'Lebanon towns to be razed 6L people can't return'

TEL AVI , 31 MARCH

Israel's military will control the area south of the Litani River in Lebanon, Defence Minister Israel Katz told military officials. The Litany River runs some 30 kilometres north of Israel's border with Iran.

"All homes in Lebanese villages near the border will be destroyed — in accordance with the Rafah and Beit Hanoun model in Gaza," in order "to remove, once and for all, the threats near the border," he said on Tuesday.

He said Israel will prohibit the return of 6,00,000 Lebanese who fled the area over the last few weeks until safety and security are "ensured" for residents of Israel's north. Nearly 1 million people have been displaced in Lebanon due to Israel's invasion after

Israel hit an ambulance facility in Lebanon, gutting several jeeps –*x*

Hezbollah began firing rockets. "The IDF will establish a security zone inside Lebanon," Katz affirmed.

Meanwhile, four IDF soldiers died while fighting in southern Lebanon. Meanwhile, Israel bombed an ambulance complex in Lebanon, killed two UN peacekeepers from Indonesia and continued airstrikes and shelling. —*Agenices*

MULLS COURT ACTION

Social media firms flouting kid ban: Aus

MELBOURNE, 31 MARCH

Australia's online safety watchdog said Tuesday it was considering court against Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok and YouTube alleging they are not doing enough to keep Australian children younger than 16 off their platforms.

Experts say the Australian courts could decide what steps the platforms can reasonably be expected to take under the laws that took effect on Dec. 10 banning young children from holding accounts.

eSAfety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant on Tuesday released her first compliance report since those laws took

—FREEPIK

effect demanding 10 platforms remove all Australian account-holders younger than 16.

While 5 million Australian accounts had been deactivated, a substantial number of Australian children continued to retain accounts, create new accounts and pass platforms' age assurance systems, the report said.

Inman Grant said in a statement her office had "significant concerns about the compliance" of half of those 10 platforms.

Meta, which owns Facebook and Instagram, said accurately determining age online is a challenge for the whole industry. Snap Inc. said it has locked 4,50,000 accounts and would continue to lock more.

Courts could order fines of up to 49.5 million Australian dollars ($33 million) for systemic failures to comply. eSafety would decide on whether to initiate court action against any platform by midyear.

Communications Minister Anika Wells said, "Social media platforms are choosing to do the absolute bare minimum because they want these laws to fail." —*PTI*

Japan deploys its first long-range missiles

TOKYO, 31 MARCH

Japan's first long-range missile was deployed at a southwestern army camp, officials said Tuesday, as the country pushes to bolster its offensive capabilities.

The upgraded Type-12 land-to-ship missiles, developed and produced by Japan's Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, became operational at Camp Kengun in Kumamoto prefecture.

It has a range of about 1,000 kilometers (620 miles).

"As Japan faces the most severe and complex security environment in the postwar era ... it is an extremely important capability to strengthen Japan's deterrence and responsiveness," Defense

Minister Shinjiro Koizumi said.

Also Tuesday, a hypersonic glide vehicle, a new weapons system designed for island defense, was deployed to Camp Fuji in the Shizuoka prefecture, west of Tokyo.

Japan considers China its main regional security threat and has fortified the country's southwestern islands near the East China Sea in recent years. —*PTI*

– ANI

Airtel's Nxtra bags $1B deal from three investors

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

Bharti Airtel on Monday announced that its subsidiary Nxtra Data has secured investment of USD 1 billion led by Alpha Wave Global, Carlyle, and Anchorage Capital. Airtel, which will also participate in the investment round, will continue to retain a controlling stake in Nxtra. As part of the pact, Alpha Wave Global will invest USD 435 million, Carlyle USD 240 million, and Anchorage Capital USD 35 million, with the rest being infused by Airtel. The investment would be utilised for AI data centre expansion and to fuel next phase of growth. Headquartered in New Delhi, Nxtra offers co-location, cloud infrastructure, managed hosting, data backup, disaster recovery, and edge computing services. *—PTI*

Cosmic PV Power files for Rs 640 crore IPO

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

Solar module manufacturer Cosmic PV Power Ltd has filed draft papers with markets regulator Sebi to raise Rs 640 crore through an Initial Public Offering (IPO). The proposed IPO comprises a fresh issue of equity shares aggregating up to Rs 540 crore and an Offer For Sale (OFS) of shares worth up to Rs 100 crore by existing shareholders, taking the total issue size to Rs 640 crore, according to the Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP) filed on Monday. The company proposes to utilise the proceeds from the fresh issue towards setting up a greenfield manufacturing facility in Narmadapuram, Madhya Pradesh, and for general corporate purposes. Cosmic PV Power is engaged in the manufacturing of solar photovoltaic (PV) modules. *—PTI*

Signature Global, RMZ form JV for Gurugram project

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

Signature Global (India) Ltd and RMZ Group have entered into an equal joint venture to develop a commercial project in Gurugram. RMZ is investing Rs 1,293 crore for a 50 per cent stake. In February, Signature Global announced a partnership with RMZ to develop an 18-acre project valued at around Rs 7,500 crore, including 55 lakh sq ft of leasable area, with 35 lakh sq ft of prime office space, retail zones, and two hotels with about 500 rooms each. Signature Global confirmed, "It has successfully secured an investment of Rs 1,293 crore from RMZ group." RMZ will hold a 50 per cent stake in Gurugram Commercity Ltd, a subsidiary of Signature. The project's total capital value is estimated at Rs 14,000–16,000 crore. *—PTI*

'India's average monthly mobile data use hits 31GB'

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

India's average monthly mobile data consumption per user crossed the 31 GB mark in 2025, up from 27.5 GB in 2024, according to a report by telecom gear maker Nokia. The 13th edition of Nokia's annual Mobile Broadband Index said pan-India monthly 5G data traffic surged 70 per cent year-on-year to reach 12.9 exabytes (EB) in 2025. With this, 5G now contributes nearly 47 per cent of the country's overall mobile broadband traffic. Overall data traffic in India crossed 27 EB per month in 2025, registering a compound annual growth rate of 21.7 per cent over the past five years. FWA emerged as a key catalyst for data traffic growth, with its share of overall 5G data crossing 25 per cent. It said a two-fold year-on-year growth in 5G FWA subscribers. *—PTI*

150% STT hike on F&O effective from today

New I-T Act to kick in, bringing in compliance changes

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

The new income tax law which includes a 150 per cent higher Securities Transaction Tax (STT) on F&O trade, apart from lower Tax Collected at Source (TCS) on overseas tour packages and Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS) remittances for healthcare and education, will come into effect from 1 April.

Another major change is the Budget announcement of higher STT on F&O trade.

STT on futures contracts will rise to 0.05 per cent from 0.02 per cent, while STT on options premiums and exercise of options will be hiked to 0.15 per cent from the present rate of 0.1 per cent and 0.125 per cent, respectively.

The higher STT is aimed at curbing speculative bets being placed on shares in the F&O segment of equity markets and is intended to protect small investors from heavy losses in speculative trades.

Also, the Budget announcement of a 20-year tax holiday up to 2047 to any foreign company that procures data centre services in India, and new safe harbour provisions with a higher threshold for software companies will come into effect from Wednesday, with the beginning of the 2026-27 fiscal.

The I-T Act, 2025, will replace the I-T Act, 1961, with effect from 1 April, 2026.

The new Act aims to present the same tax policy in a more logical, accessible, and reader-friendly format.

The Income Tax department has said that its e-filing portal will facilitate compliance under both the old and new Income Tax Acts in the transition period, and all assessments, appeals, and other proceedings relating to earlier years will continue to be conducted under the old Act until their final resolution.

Taxpayers filing returns for AY 2026-27 (pertaining to the period governed by the old Act) in July 2026 will do so using the forms prescribed under the old Act.

Advance tax payments for Tax Year 2026-27, commencing from June 2026, will be made in accordance with the new Act. *—PTI*

RBI delays new lending rules after industry pushback

MUMBAI, 31 MARCH

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) announced on Monday that the implementation of acquisition finance guidelines has been postponed by three months, now scheduled for 1 July 2026, following feedback from stakeholders.

The central bank also updated the "Amendment Directions on Capital Market Exposures" framework, initially announced on 13 February.

The RBI had introduced the guidelines after a consultative process to enable domestic lenders to fund acquisitions. "On a review, based on further discussions with the stakeholders and on a review, it has been decided to extend the effective date of the said Amendment Directions by three months to 1 July, 2026," the RBI stated on its website.

Key modifications include an expanded definition of acquisition finance to cover mergers and amalgamations, with limits on lending for acquiring non-financial entities.

The rules permit acquiring companies to avail acquisition finance for on-lending to subsidiaries in India or abroad for target acquisition.

Limits on loans against securities have been set at Rs 10 lakh per individual and Rs 25 lakh for IPO-related loans, with restrictions on multiple lenders.

Refinance is only allowed after the acquisition process is complete and control of the target company is established, with refinances solely for debt retirement. A corporate guarantee from the acquiring company will be required for financing extended to subsidiaries or SPVs. *—Agencies*

Magnum Ice Cream buys 61.9% stake in Kwality Wall's

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

Magnum Ice Cream Netherlands has completed the acquisition of a 61.9 per cent majority stake in Kwality Wall's (India) Ltd (KWIL), resulting in a change in the promoter classification.

"On 30 March, 2026, the Incoming Promoter acquired the Sale Shares from the Outgoing Promoters in accordance with the SPA and other applicable laws," KWIL said in a regulatory filing.

Pursuant to this transaction, the Incoming Promoter has acquired control over the company and is classified as a "promoter" of the company in accordance with the Listing Regulations, it added.

Meanwhile, the outgoing promoters have been reclassified from the "promoter" category to the public category.

This acquisition is done as per the Share Purchase Agreement executed on 25 June, 2025. *—PTI*

War crisis to hit India's FY27 GDP growth by 1%: EY

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

India's real GDP growth for the next fiscal could erode by around 1 percentage point, while retail inflation could rise by about 1.5 percentage points from their baseline estimates if the Middle East conflict persists through the next fiscal, an EY report said.

The EY Economy Watch report said employment-intensive sectors like textiles, paints, chemicals, fertilizers, cement and tires, could be directly impacted. Any reduction in employment or incomes in these sectors may further dampen aggregate demand. Indian economy, which imports nearly 90 per cent of its crude oil, is also highly dependent on imports of natural gas and fertilizers, and is particularly vulnerable to such external shocks and may have a cascading effect on multiple sectors through strong forward and backward linkages with crude oil and energy.

Meanwhile, the rising tensions involving Iran, Israel, and the US in West Asia are now being reflected in global financial markets. Brent crude prices have climbed to record levels this month, while Asian equities are on track for their steepest decline since 2022. The geopolitical strain has heightened investor concerns about rising inflation and the risk of a broader economic slowdown.

Brent crude gained nearly 2 per cent to reach $114.98 per barrel and is projected to surge about 59 per cent over March, marking its largest monthly increase on record. Similarly, US crude (WTI) rose 1.8 per cent to $104.73 per barrel, taking its monthly gain to roughly 56 per cent — the sharpest rise in almost six years. The spike in oil prices is largely driven by fears surrounding the Iran conflict and potential disruptions to global energy supplies. *—Agencies*

WAR'S IMPACT ON AIRLINES HARD TO QUANTIFY

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

With sharp rise in fuel costs as well as tight capacity and thin margins for airlines, airfares are already rising in the wake of the Middle East war, global airlines' grouping IATA said on Tuesday.

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) represents around 350 airlines, including Air India, Air India Express, IndiGo, and SpiceJet.

The data said total demand in terms of Revenue Passenger Kilometres rose 6.1 per cent last month compared to the year-ago period. Total capacity, measured in Available Seat Kilometres, increased 5.6 per cent year-on-year while the passenger load factor stood at 81.4 per cent, the highest February figure on record, it said in a release.

IATA Director General Willie Walsh said with an RPK expansion of 6.1 per cent, February was a strong month, showing that the fundamentals for demand growth were in place for a positive year. *—PTI*

11 RARE MINERALS AUCTION CANCELLED

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

The government has cancelled the auction of 11 critical and strategic mineral blocks which were put on sale in the sixth round on account of poor investor response and lack of qualified bidders.

The development comes as a setback to the government's efforts to ramp up domestic exploration and production of critical minerals amid global supply chain disruptions.

In an annulment notice, the mines ministry said that the auction process for 5 mineral blocks was cancelled since no bids were received.

The notice further said the auction process of five other mineral blocks was annulled as there were less than three technically-qualified bidders.

Besides, auction process for Beku Rare Metal Block, West Bengal was also annulled.

The mines ministry had in September last year launched the sixth tranche of auction for 23 critical mineral blocks across 13 states. The blocks contain strategic minerals including lithium, cobalt, rare earth elements, niobium, tantalum, & vanadium.

So far, six rounds of auctions have been completed, with 46 critical and strategic mineral blocks already sold, according to the mines ministry. *—PTI*

'India boosting reliable semiconductor supplier role'

SANAND, 31 MARCH

Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** on Tuesday said the 21st Century has brought several challenges and global supply chains have been affected due to conflicts, emphasising that the government is laying a strong foundation for technology and energy security in the coming decades.

Modi inaugurated Kaynes Semicon's outsourced semiconductor plant in Sanand, marking the commencement of production, and said India is strengthening its role as a reliable semiconductor supplier in the global market.

In a sense, a new bridge has emerged today between Sanand and Silicon Valley, he said.

Addressing a gathering on the occasion, Modi said India is actively building a robust semiconductor ecosystem and simultaneously making significant efforts to establish a resilient supply chain for raw materials.

Modi noted that when the Coronavirus pandemic disrupted supply chains, India had decided to become a hub of semiconductor manufacturing.

"India is actively building a robust semiconductor ecosystem and simultaneously making significant efforts to establish a resilient supply chain for raw materials. India's participation in Pax Silica is a testament to this very endeavour. Working in tandem with our global partners, we aim to ensure a secure supply chain," Modi added.

Citing industry estimates, Modi said India's semiconductor market is at Rs 4.5 lakh crore, which is expected to cross Rs 9 lakh crore. *—PTI*

Sebi bars Elitecon over 'manipulation'

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

Markets regulator Sebi has barred Elitecon International Ltd, its Promoter and Managing Director Vipin Sharma, and four others from accessing the securities market over alleged manipulative activities and misleading disclosures.

In an interim ex-parte order passed on Monday, Sebi directed the impounding of alleged unlawful gains of about Rs 51.26 crore from Sharma and four other entities.

Additionally, Sebi said it will conduct a detailed investigation into the case and appoint a forensic auditor.

The action follows a probe into trading in the scrip of Elitecon International, where the regulator found prima facie evidence that the company and its insiders misled investors by suppressing material information about its operations and financials, while simultaneously offloading shares at inflated prices.

Sebi alleged that the companies suppressed material information to present a misleading picture of its financials and operations. *—PTI*

After 5-yrs, Indian biz delegation visits China

BEIJING, 31 MARCH

An Indian chambers of commerce delegation is currently visiting China to interact with their counterparts here, marking the first such visit after the five-year freeze in relations.

A delegation of the Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Chambers of Commerce and Industry (PHDCCI) is on a visit to Shanghai and China's Jiangsu province, one of the most industrialised areas of China, from Mar 29 to April 4.

This is the first Indian trade delegation to visit China after the two countries normalised bilateral relations last year following the military standoff at Eastern Ladakh in 2020.

A brochure on the visit of the delegation said the aim was to identify trading, investment and partnership opportunities, fostering B2B collaborations, learning from China's clean mobility and battery innovations and exploring renewable integrations and supply chains.

The Indian Consulate General of Shanghai, Pratik Mathur, on Tuesday hosted Business Round Table between PHDCCI Delegation and others. *—PTI*

DEC CRISIS FALLOUT

IndiGo appoints IATA Chief William Walsh as CEO

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

The country's largest airline IndiGo on Tuesday announced the appointment of **William Walsh**, a pilot and current chief of the global airlines' grouping IATA, as its next CEO.

The appointment comes less than three weeks after the sudden exit of Pieter Elbers against the backdrop of massive operational disruptions at the airline in December last year.

An airline industry veteran, Walsh, popularly known as Willie, was formerly CEO of British Airways and IAG (International Airlines Group, a holding company, which owns Aer Lingus, British Airways, Iberia, Level and Vueling).

In a release, said his tenure at IATA comes to a close on July 31 and is expected to join no later than August 3.

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) is the global grouping of airlines, including IndiGo, Air India, Air India Express and SpiceJet.

The appointment of Walsh was approved by the board of InterGlobe Aviation on Tuesday.

As IndiGo CEO, Walsh will be responsible for the overall management and strategic direction of the airline with a focus on transformational initiatives to strengthen the operational performance, advance the company's network and commercial strategy while enhancing customer experience.

Walsh will also be among the few CEOs who are also pilots. He will be the third foreign CEO for IndiGo, which started operations in August 2006.

IndiGo Managing Director Rahul Bhatia described Walsh as an "iconic & accomplished aviation leader". *—PTI*

Revised Jaypee bid tops Adani offer: Vedanta to SC

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

Mining billionaire Anil Agarwal's Vedanta Ltd has told the Supreme Court that its tweaked bid for the bankrupt Jaiprakash Associates Ltd was rejected despite being better than Adani Group's offer.

In its petition challenging the lenders' decision to accept Adani's takeover offer, Vedanta contended that its addendum bid is about Rs 3,400 crore higher in gross value terms and roughly Rs 500 crore more in net present value compared to the Adani Group's offer.

In the bid challenge process and final resolution plan submitted on 14 October, 2025, Vedanta offered Rs 3,770 in upfront payment and Rs 3,100 crore at the end of the 365th day from the effective date to secured financial creditors. It also offered an equity infusion of Rs 400 crore into Jaypee.

Thereafter, on 8 November, 2025, Vedanta submitted an addendum via email, offering to raise the upfront cash payout to Rs 6,563 crore and equity infusion to Rs 800 crore while keeping the overall bid value at Rs 12,505.85 crore.

The committee of creditors accepted Adani's bid because it offered around Rs 6,000 crore upfront cash payment and faster payments for the remaining amount within two years, compared to Vedanta's longer payment timeline of up to five years. *—PTI*

UP Prometheans joins UTT line up for Season 7

MUMBAI, 31 MARCH

UP Prometheans have replaced Chennai Lions in Ultimate Table Tennis (UTT), organisers announced on Tuesday ahead of Season 7. Owned by entrepreneur Mukesh Sharma, the new franchise marks the league's entry into Uttar Pradesh. The seventh season, scheduled in Goa in July, will feature seven teams in a single round-robin format, with each side playing the others once. The total number of ties rises to 24 from 23 in the past two seasons. UTT CEO Ekansh Gupta said the addition reflects the league's growing national footprint. Sharma expressed confidence in building a competitive side. Jaipur Patriots have exited the

— PTI

US' Pickleball Kingdom launches 1st court in India

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

US-based Pickleball Kingdom has launched its first court in India, a state-of-the-art rooftop facility in the national capital. Built in Okhla in partnership with real estate developer Max Estates and local partner BAQ Wizards Pvt Ltd, the venue marks the brand's India entry. Operating over 400 locations in the United States, the company is now eyeing rapid expansion in India, citing strong growth potential for the sport. Promoters Bhanu Gulati and Anuj Duggal said pickleball is a unifying movement and expressed optimism about its prospects in the country. The company plans to partner with franchisees nationwide to expand its footprint and popularise it. —PTI

West Indies fined 10% match fee for slow over-rate

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

West Indies have been fined 10 per cent of their match fee for maintaining a slow over-rate in the first Women's ODI against Australia in St Kitts on Friday. Captain Hayley Matthews pleaded guilty and accepted the sanction, avoiding a formal hearing. Match referee Reon King imposed the fine after the hosts were ruled two overs short, accounting for time allowances. Australia won the match by 103 runs and now lead the three-match series 2-0 after a 90-run victory in the second ODI. Half-centuries from Beth Mooney and strong bowling by Georgia Wareham and Ash Gardner sealed the result. —PTI

Pressure on Pant as LSG begin IPL against DC

Pant is struggling to find consistency as skipper and batter

LUCKNOW, 31 MARCH

Pressure will be firmly on Rishabh Pant as Lucknow Super Giants (LSG) begin their IPL 2026 campaign against a well-rounded Delhi Capitals here on Wednesday.

Pant endured a difficult first season as captain, struggling for consistency both as leader and frontline batter, while injuries to key players, particularly fast bowlers, further derailed LSG's campaign.

This season, however, he has a fully fit squad at his disposal, strengthened by the addition of experienced pacers Mohammed Shami and Anrich Nortje.

A lot will hinge on the fitness and form of pace sensation Mayank Yadav, who has worked extensively on his conditioning over the past year. Mohsin Khan is also set to return from injury, while young Prince Yadav has impressed with his medium pace in the nets. Mystery spinner Digvesh Singh Rathi, who caught the eye last season, will be keen to build on his promising debut.

Compared to the bowling unit, LSG's batting line-up appears more settled.

Mitchell Marsh and Aiden Markram are expected to form a formidable opening pair. Pant, who struggled at No. 4 for much of last season before finding success higher up, is likely to bat in the top order this time, with Nicholas Pooran slotted in at No. 4.

Delhi Capitals, meanwhile, will look to correct the inconsistencies that cost them a playoff berth last year despite a strong start.

The side experimented with as many as seven opening combinations, but will aim for greater stability this season. KL Rahul is certain to open, with Prithvi Shaw, Abhishek Porel and Pathum Nissanka in contention for the second slot.

The middle order has been reinforced with the inclusion of David Miller alongside Tristan Stubbs.

Despite Mitchell Starc being unavailable for the opener due to injury, DC still boast a potent attack led by captain Axar Patel and spinner Kuldeep Yadav.

The addition of Lungi Ngidi further strengthens the pace unit, while T Natarajan returns fully fit after missing last season. —PTI

AUS COACH BACKS GREEN AFTER RAHANE SNUB

SYDNEY, 31 MARCH

Australia head coach Andrew McDonald has backed Cameron Green to handle the weight of expectations in both the IPL and international cricket, saying the all-rounder has the ability to balance demands and see his career "trend upwards".

Green's role has been under scrutiny after Ajinkya Rahane, captain of Kolkata Knight Riders, indicated the injured all-rounder would not bowl against Mumbai Indians, sparking debate over his fitness. Cricket Australia later clarified that the franchise was fully aware of the 26-year-old's back niggle, which requires him to refrain from bowling for 10-12 days.

Green, bought by KKR for Rs 25.20 crore, the most expensive overseas signing in IPL history — faces added pressure given his price tag.

Despite concerns over his fitness, McDonald indicated Green remains in contention as an all-format player. —PTI

JADUMANI GOES DOWN

Priya wins opening bout in Asian Boxing Championships

ULAANBAATAR, 31 MARCH

India's Priya recorded a dominant victory, while Jadumani Singh went down fighting on the second day of the Asian Boxing Championships here on Tuesday.

Competing in the women's 60kg category, Priya outclassed Kazakhstan's Rimma Volossenko 5-0 in a unanimous decision, displaying control and composure throughout to advance to the next round. She will next face second seed Chengyu Yang.

Jadumani, however, suffered a narrow 2-3 split-decision defeat against Japan's top seed Rimma Yamaguchi, who had previously secured silver at the Astana event and bronze at the Boxing World Cup finals. The Indian matched his opponent punch for punch in one of the closest bouts of the day.

In another highlight, Taiwan's Olympic champion Lin Yu-ting marked her return to international competition with a comfortable 5-0 win over Thailand's Thananya Somnuek in the round of 16 of the 60kg division. The victory set up a quarter-final clash with Japan's Ayaka Taguchi.

The 30-year-old had only recently been cleared to compete after World Boxing confirmed her eligibility following a gene test under its new sex eligibility policy. Introduced last August, the rule mandates a one-time genetic test to detect the presence of a Y chromosome.

Lin, a two-time world champion, had qualified in December by beating compatriot Wu Shih-yi. Her participation comes amid ongoing debate over eligibility rules, after both she and Algeria's Imane Khelif won gold at the Paris Olympics, sparking global scrutiny despite meeting existing criteria. —PTI

Fakhar suspended for 2 PSL matches over ball tampering

LAHORE, 31 MARCH

Fakhar Zaman has been suspended for two matches in the Pakistan Super League (PSL) after being found guilty of altering the condition of the ball during Lahore Qalandars' clash against Karachi Kings.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said the opener committed a Level 3 offence under Article 2.14 of the Code of Conduct. The incident occurred before the final over of Karachi's innings, when on-field umpires penalised Lahore Qalandars five runs and replaced the ball. Despite denying the charge, Fakhar was found guilty following a disciplinary hearing conducted by match referee Roshan Mahanama.

Umpires Shahid Saikat, Faisal Khan Aafreedi, Asif Yaqoob and Tariq Rasheed levelled the charge. Fakhar's suspension will affect upcoming matches against Multan Sultans on April 3 and Islamabad United on April 9.

Separately, Lahore Qalandars fined captain Shaheen Shah Afridi PKR 1 million for breaching hotel security protocols. Police alleged Afridi and Sikandar Raza escorted four unauthorised visitors to a player's room. The franchise took action to uphold discipline, though no sanction was imposed on Raza, who later said the visitors were his family and friends. In another development, fast bowler Naseem Shah was fined PKR 20 million for a controversial social media post violating his central contract. —PTI

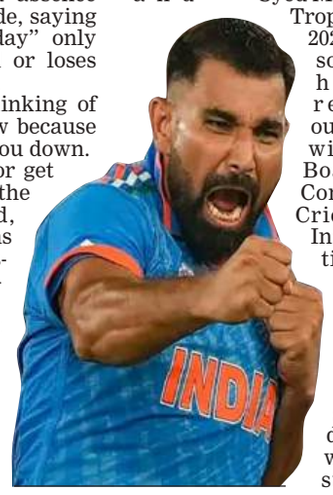
Shami dismisses retirement talk amid snub by selectors

LUCKNOW, 31 MARCH

Mohammed Shami has dismissed thoughts of retirement despite an extended absence from the national side, saying he will "call it a day" only when he feels tired or loses interest in the game.

"I am not even thinking of retirement right now because such thoughts pull you down. The day I feel lazy or get bored, I'll leave," the 35-year-old said, asserting he remains motivated and satisfied with his performances.

Shami has not played for India since the Champions Trophy final against New Zealand on March 9, 2025. Despite returning to full fitness and impressive domestic outings for Bengal — claiming 67 wickets across the Ranji Trophy, Vijay Hazare Trophy and Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy in the 2025-26 season — he has remained out of favour with the Board of Control for Cricket in India selection panel led by Ajit Agarkar.



His absence has sparked debate, with some suggesting Indian cricket has moved on amid the rise of younger pacers. Shami had earlier opted out of selection for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy and the England Test tour, citing incomplete recovery from a foot injury. Tensions also surfaced when Shami publicly criticised a lack of communication from selectors, prompting a response from Agarkar, though the exchange did little to alter his situation.

Now representing Lucknow Super Giants in IPL 2026 after a move from Sunrisers Hyderabad, Shami is focused on delivering results. A Purple Cap winner in 2023, he endured a modest 2025 season with six wickets in nine matches but is aiming for a strong comeback, stressing effort and attitude over factors beyond his control. —Salar News

Ganguly backs BCCI over shared venues for Tests

KOLKATA, 31 MARCH

Sourav Ganguly has backed the BCCI's move to take Test cricket to newer venues, saying while he would "love" to host more matches at Eden Gardens, it is important to spread the game across the country.

Reacting to Kolkata and Mumbai missing out on the Border-Gavaskar Trophy Tests in 2026-27, Ganguly said Eden has already had its share, having hosted a Test against South Africa besides T20 World Cup and IPL games. The upcoming home season features series against West Indies, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe and Australia, with Kolkata and Mumbai allotted only white-ball fixtures.

Guwahati and Ranchi continue to gain prominence, while Ahmedabad also returns as a Test venue. Ganguly said he was "happy" to see matches in cities with strong facilities.

Former India spinner Venkatapathy Raju, however, favoured a return to traditional centres like Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai, Delhi and Kanpur, citing their unique charm. —PTI

29 teams set for sub-junior women's national hockey

RANCHI, 31 MARCH

- The tournament, running till 12 April, will feature Division 'A', 'B' and 'C', with the top two teams from Divisions 'B' and 'C' earning promotion, while the bottom two in Divisions 'A' and 'B' face relegation.

As many as 29 teams will compete across three divisions in a promotion and relegation format when the 16th Sub-Junior Women's National Championship begins here on Wednesday.

The tournament, running till April 12, will feature Division 'A', 'B' and 'C', with the top two teams from Divisions 'B' and 'C' earning promotion, while the bottom two in Divisions 'A' and 'B' face relegation.

Division 'A', comprising 12 teams split into four pools, will decide the champion, with knockouts from 9 April and the final on 12 April.

Hosts Hockey Jharkhand headline Pool A alongside Bihar and Maharashtra. Pool B has Odisha, Punjab and Andhra Pradesh, while Pool C features Haryana, Madhya Pradesh and Manipur.

Pool D includes Mizoram, Uttar Pradesh Hockey and Chhattisgarh.

Division 'B' (1-6 April) and Division 'C' (1-4 April) will follow league formats. Matches will be held at the Marang Gomke Jaipal Singh Astroturf Stadium.

Teams earn three points for a win and one for a draw, with Division 'A' knockouts decided by shoot-outs if required.

Five matches mark the opening day, starting with Jammu & Kashmir vs Puducherry at 6am. —PTI

Hosts Hockey Jharkhand headline Pool A alongside Bihar and Maharashtra —PTI

India ready for semi-final battle in SAFF U20

MALE, 31 MARCH

Defending champions India are confident ahead of their semi-final clash with Bhutan in the SAFF U20 Championship at the National Stadium here on Wednesday. The other semi-final will see Nepal face Bangladesh.

India's under-20 men's team advanced after a strong group stage, topping Group B with victories over Pakistan (3-0) and a 1-1 draw against Bangladesh. The squad utilised a three-day break to recover physically, reset mentally, and strengthen team bonds, including a day out at the beach.

Head coach Mahesh Gawli praised his team, stating that "the boys have been playing well and handled pressure effectively. Despite limited preparation, they are giving their best, and I am proud of their performance."

Gawli also acknowledged that the semi-final will require even greater focus. He emphasised the need to convert chances and maintain defensive discipline, adding, "Nothing is easy; we created opportunities, but need to be more clinical and focused in defence."

Bhutan reached the semi-finals after a resilient campaign in Group A.

They lost their opener against Nepal but responded with a goalless draw versus the Maldives, and sealed qualification with a late goal to beat Sri Lanka 1-0. Their ability to stay in the contest until the final whistle demonstrated their determination.

India will need to be cautious of Bhutan's disciplined play and their knack for seizing key moments. The match featured forwards Vishal Yadav and Omang Dodum, each with two goals, while Bhutan's Dhendup Gyeltshen also poses a major threat. —PTI

NO REPLACEMENT YET

World Cup-bound Ghana fires coach after 4 losses in a row

ACCRA/ZENICA/ MONTERREY, 31 MARCH

Otto Addo has been sacked as Ghana coach after four successive friendly defeats, with the Ghana Football Association announcing it had "parted ways" with him with immediate effect ahead of the World Cup.

The decision followed a 2-1 loss to Germany, after earlier defeats including a 5-1 thrashing by Austria. Ghana are due to face Panama, England and Croatia in Group L. The federation has not named a replacement. Addo, in his second stint, had guided Ghana to the 2022 World Cup and a qualifying group win last year but failed to secure an Africa Cup of Nations berth.

In Europe, Italy national football team face a decisive playoff against Bosnia and Herzegovina national football team, aiming to avoid missing a third straight World Cup. Italy last featured in 2014 and recently beat Northern Ireland 2-0, while Bosnia advanced past Wales on penalties. Other playoff finals include Sweden vs Poland, Kosovo vs Turkey and Czech Republic vs Denmark.

Meanwhile, Iraq national football team coach Graham Arnold said his side had endured a "very difficult" journey to reach Mexico for their intercontinental playoff against Bolivia national football team. Stranded amid the West Asia conflict and facing travel and visa hurdles, Iraq arrived after a 25-hour journey and now seek a first World Cup appearance since 1986. —PTI

Wrestler's comeback after injury ends 9-yr wait for gold

AMBIKAPUR, 31 MARCH

"How could I give up?" said Poonam Oraon after battling injury to clinch gold at the Khelo India Tribal Games 2026, ending a nine-year wait for a national title.

Competing with a heavily strapped shoulder, the 19-year-old from Jharkhand fought through pain to defeat Telangana's K Geetha in the women's 50kg final. Poonam, who first dislocated her shoulder at the age of 10, said the recurring injury has been a constant challenge but never deterred her resolve.

"This injury is nothing compared to the pain of not winning gold for nine years," she said after securing her first national-level title.

Hailing from Suiyabar village in Chatra district, Poonam had to stay away from the sport for nearly a year after her initial injury in 2017.

She later won bronze medals at the School Games Federation of India nationals in 2018 and 2019 but continued to chase a gold.

Despite not being fully fit, and against her family's advice, she competed with the backing of her coach and support staff. Now training in Ranchi, she is pursuing a BA in Political Science from Ranchi University.

Her next target is qualification for the Junior Nationals as she looks to build on her breakthrough victory. —PTI